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New Delhi, 1961

JESUS CHRIST

THE LIGHT
OF THE WORLD

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
THIRD ASSEMBLY NEW DELHI 1961



O Thou who art the light of the minds that know Thee,
the life of the souls that love Thee, and the strength of the
wills that serve Thee, help us so to know Thee that
we may truly love Thee, so to love Thee that we may fully
serve Thee, whom to serve is perfect freedom; through
Jesus Christ our Lord.

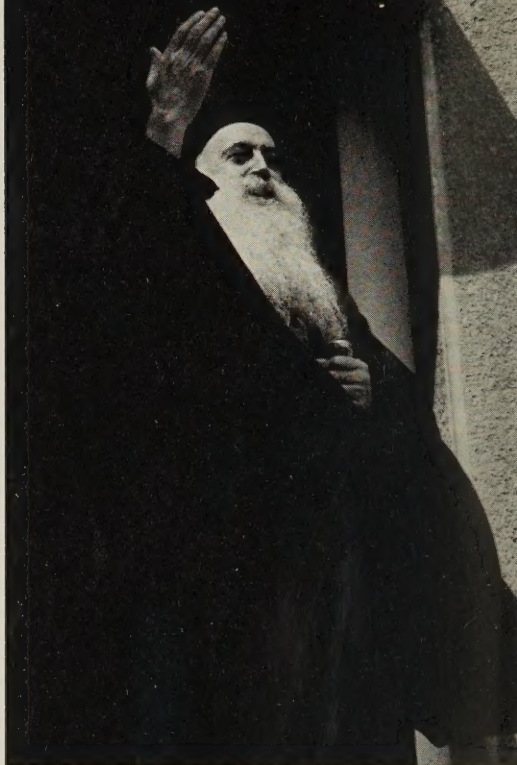
Amen

JESUS CHRIST

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Grant, O Lord, that as this broken bread was scattered upon
the mountains and being gathered together was made one,
so Thy Church may be gathered together from the ends of the
earth into Thy Kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the
power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

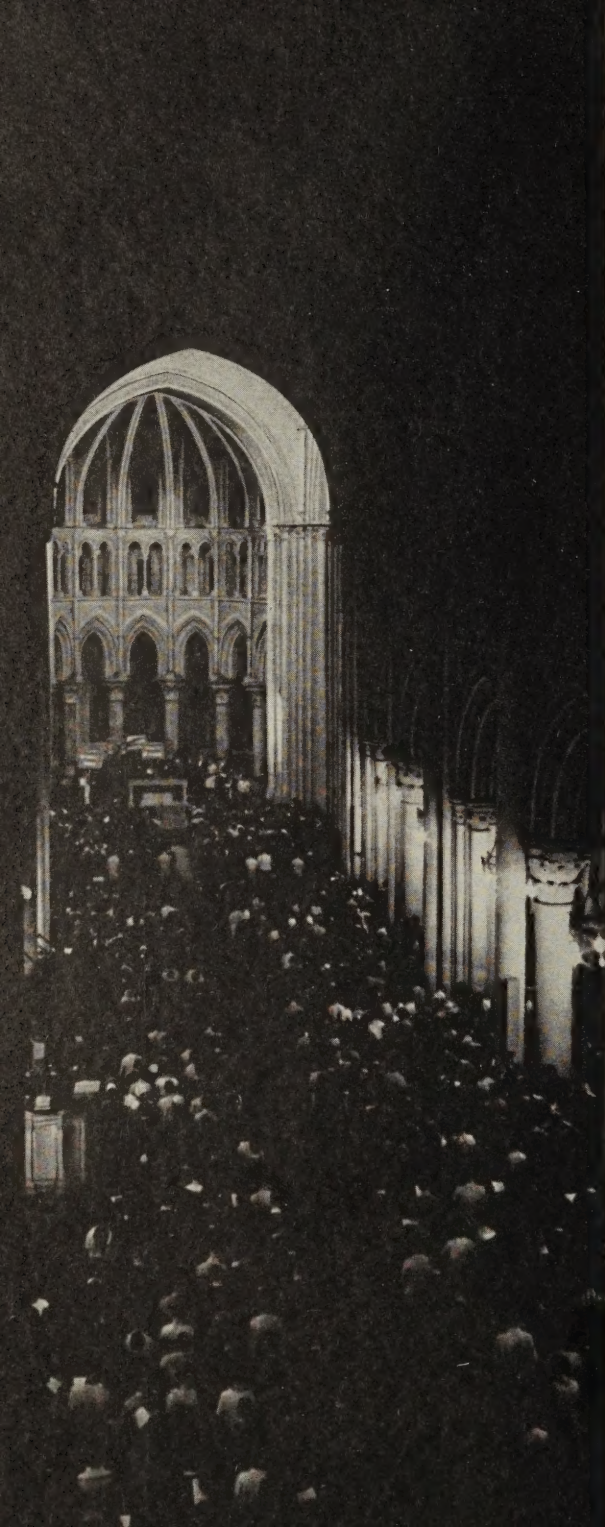
Amen



CHURCHES ALL OVER THE
WORLD WILL STUDY AND PRAY
FOR THE THIRD ASSEMBLY.







Study Booklet

Third Assembly of the
World Council of Churches
New Delhi, India

November 18 - December 6, 1961.

FOR SUGGESTIONS ON
HOW TO USE
THIS BOOKLET SEE PAGE 73.

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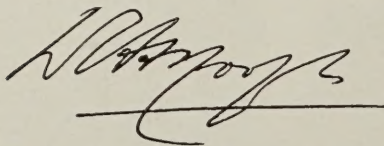
The World Council of Churches requests the pleasure of your company at the Third Assembly of the World Council to be held in New Delhi, India, in November 1961.

Please do not take this too literally! The Vigyan Bhavan hall in which we will meet is quite large, but it cannot possibly accommodate the hundreds of thousands of members of the churches to whom this brochure will go in all parts of the world and in very many languages. No, what we mean is that we need your spiritual presence, your personal participation in this event. For the whole point of having a World Council of Churches is to have the churches enter into a common search for a clearer manifestation of the real unity of the Church and into fellowship and co-operation in their mission and service. And these churches that meet together through their chosen delegates have their real life in the local congregations, in the common worship and the working and living together of individual Christian men and women.

PREFACE

Christian people often ask how they can play their part in this new ecumenical movement of our time. Here is one opportunity. As your congregation takes up the study and discussion of the themes of this booklet you will implement your membership in the world-embracing community of the people of God. As you seek to understand anew our common obedience to Jesus Christ the Light of the World, you will discover something of the glorious mystery of the varieties of spiritual gifts which He inspires. You will see your own tasks in the setting of the common calling of the whole Church of Christ.

So this is a real invitation and we therefore end by saying: Please reply by working through these pages and sending your conclusions to your church headquarters.



DR. W. A. VISSER 'T HOOFT,
GENERAL SECRETARY,
WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES.

JESUS CHRIST

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

THE CONVERSATION

"I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." This is an extraordinary announcement. It asserts a unique place for Jesus Christ as the light. More than this, it asserts His power over the world, power to give life to men. Yet, however extraordinary the claim, the living Christ continues to make it. The point is not that some people say this about Him, but that He as living Lord still confronts men. People try to forget Him but sooner or later the claim is renewed. Whatever the response, He invites men to continue the conversation with Him.

Who are the people whom He addresses? Men as they they are, going about their daily work, living from one day to the next. Men preoccupied with themselves and their families: content or distracted, bored or worried. Men of every kind, rich and poor, farmers and factory workers, students and soldiers, those who call themselves by His name and those who do not. All of us, just as we are.

What is the conversation about? It is about Christ the light. Light is a word that we all use daily. Light and energy are basic to the world in which we live; without the sun's light life would cease. But because light is such a basic thing, we use the word "light" in all kinds of other senses as well as the literal one. We speak of getting light on a question which puzzles us, and of being in the dark when we do not know or see the path ahead. Light has become a symbol for health and freedom and all the things that people long for; and this is true in the Bible as in other books.

Is it these things that Jesus Christ is talking about when he claims to be the light of the world? Yes—and no. Yes, because He did quite literally heal blind men and desperately sick men; yes, because He did give many people

what they longed for; and no, because not everyone found the light they wanted in Him. Some people, who were reasonably contented with things as they were, were told that the light they thought they had was darkness. And this is still true today. The light of Christ does not always look like light to men and if we start by saying, "I know what light is, and Jesus Christ isn't that light", we have missed the point of the conversation. We are not yet listening to Him, but only to ourselves or to someone else. His claim is unlike other claims, and it needs careful attention.

Suppose then that we go deeper and notice that the Bible often speaks of light when it refers to God Himself. In this too it is like many other books. It is true of many religions that when they refer to what is divine they use the word "light". According to the Koran, Allah is the light of heaven and earth; through his revelation he guides men on the path to his light. In India deities are often described in similar terms. Shiva, for example, is "light everywhere, so that one cannot say, it is here or it is there". The Absolute of the Vedanta is defined as "light illumined, shining by itself". Buddhism declares that the teaching of the Buddha is the light which drives out darkness. Can we learn from the meanings of light in these other religions what it is that Jesus claims to be?

Here we must answer no. His claim to be the Light of the World is indeed a claim that He comes from God. But the God about whom He speaks is not simply to be understood as the Highest Being to whom other religions and philosophies aspire. He is not simply the source of illumination for our minds, nor does his light consist only in teaching about the way we should follow. No. He is the high and holy One who revealed His Name and gave His command to Abraham, Moses and the prophets. He chose a people, Israel, for His own special purposes, and led them out of slavery, guiding them through the wilderness towards the promised land by a pillar of fire and cloud. They met Him at every turning of this road and although they frequently rebelled, they discovered that they could not ignore His commands. It was not so much that they knew Him, but that He knew them, inside and out, and this sense of being known by Him was something from which they could not escape. His word came to them, and they could not help listening. So they spoke of His presence as blinding light, awe-inspiring glory; something which would be unbearable were it not for the discovery that the only reason why He continued to keep His grip on them was that He cared about them, wherever they went and whatever they did. To them His light signified His glory and his power, His word and His faithfulness, His searing condemnation and His healing mercy.

We might suppose that this Biblical account of the God with whom we have to do is only one of many accounts, any of which might be true. But the Bible itself is far from content with this answer. Its prophets, lawgivers and apostles witnessed to the God of Israel as the only God, beyond the reach of comparison. He alone rules the heavens and the earth. He it is who in the beginning said "Let there be light" and there was light. When He made a people out of a demoralized rabble in Egypt He was simply continuing—in His most unexpected way—the process which had been begun in the creation itself—a process which would lead in His good time to nothing less than a new creation.

Over and over again, the Biblical writers testify to the uniqueness of this people because of the uniqueness of its God. It is as a fulfilment of God's promise to His people, as an announcement of the dawn of the new creation, that the extraordinary declaration of Jesus must be understood. In claiming to be the light of the world, the Son of God asserts His power to show us the God whom He knows as Father: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." He too is an Israelite, His people the people of Israel, and their tongue His mother tongue. He is claiming that the light which came into the world with Him is the same light about which the Law and the Prophets had spoken. Moreover, this light according to His claim has the power to enable men to become children of God. Such power, not only to illumine the world around us but to penetrate and to transform our inmost being, is a very particular kind of light.

Therefore, we cannot describe the activity of Jesus simply by saying that He speaks to us or holds a conversation with us; whether we know it or not, He does things to us, and whether we like it or not, He knows us through and through. This sense of being known is perhaps the deepest awareness in all human experience; but not all can acknowledge who it is that knows them. So we must remind ourselves exactly who He is and what He does; then we shall be better able to accept—or reject—His claim upon us.

The Apostles' Creed speaks of Him as the Son of God who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and descended into hell, who was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, who sits at the right hand of God and will come to judge the living and the dead.

* * *

How did the Church come to make such a confession? It was summarizing the apostolic message and tradition, which had been handed down by word of mouth as well as in the written Scriptures: "Though He was in the form of God He did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him ..." (Phil. 2: 6 to 10).

In the gospels the life of this Jesus is described in greater detail: Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan ... He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan ... He came preaching the good news of God ... He taught as one who had authority ... He ate with sinners and tax-collectors ... He declared all foods clean ... He said to them that the Son of Man must suffer ... "Take up your cross and follow me" ... He entered Jerusalem and the temple ... He ate the Passover with his disciples ... He said to them "You will all fall away" ... He was betrayed, arrested, tried, sentenced, mocked and spat upon, crucified, laid in a tomb ... And then on Easter morning: "Do you seek Jesus of Nazareth? ... He has risen" ...

How do Christians acknowledge the light of the risen Christ? They do so by submitting themselves to His power. We can now see more clearly what this power is. People come to Him and find healing when they are sick, comfort when they are sad, tired or lonely, and joy in simply being with Him. But He can also be stern: He is uncompromising in condemning every kind of small-mindedness and selfishness and hypocrisy. This is the burning light of His judgment on sin. Yet He never stops caring about everyone who needs His help: this is the light of His love. And when He dies this is the most drastic judgment of all upon other human beings: that He cares for them enough to die for them, while they are not willing to die for Him. But this only goes to show His love for them: so that on the Cross the light of His judgment, showing us up for what we are, and the light of His love, showing us what He thinks we are worth in spite of everything, come together in one blaze of light which judges us and saves us at the same time. Light shows things up for what they are. In this light we see not only ourselves but other men and women as they really are, and know that they, like us, can be accepted and transformed by Him. We become able to care about them as He did. The fact that we are able to do this at all surprises us, and often we fail, but at the least His new light is shed on the world round about us. We begin to see how He shares all human longings for the light, and yet transforms them all. He weeps for Jerusalem, but asks for no pity for Himself. More surprising still, His light not only makes the world round about us something new; it makes us into something new too. Before we were blind; now we see. What we see is Him—in other people; and even, although this seems impossible, in ourselves.

This is how His light still shines; not, like the light of other great figures, through His teachings, but from Himself, and because He gave Himself for others and still gives Himself in His Body, the Church. He has given to the Church His power, the Holy Spirit, and has entrusted it with His ministry of reconciliation (Acts 1 and 2). In the world of suffering and darkness, His victory is made available through the Church. To men self-deceived and self-despairing, the victorious news of the apostles and prophets comes through





the Church. The Church's witness in every age, including our own, is the witness of all the saints and martyrs who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, break bread together at one table and are drawn out of darkness into His marvellous light. It is the witness of those who in every land join in the Church's shout of praise, "Light of Light, Very God of Very God".

But it is easy to speak of these things and hard to live by them. Many human doubts and preoccupations and many forms of self-love make people blind. So Christians must admit that although they make these extraordinary claims they remain very ordinary folk, taking comfort only from this, that their Lord has laid His hand upon them and will always sustain them. To accept His claim is difficult because of its exclusiveness: only through Him do men receive the light of life. But it is also difficult because of its inclusiveness: He died for all men. The circle of our love remains tiny in comparison with the range of His love. For those who do in fact trust His claim the world

provides ample difficulties and abundant opportunities to walk in His light, wherever that light encounters darkness.

* * *

Where in today's world do we see this darkness? It includes the sorrow and grief of those who suffer; children without homes, refugees without food, all those who are oppressed. Among us are millions whose hearts are poisoned by guilt, unforgiven, unreconciled. How many have seen the open door to the future shut against themselves! How many shudder at the catastrophes looming on the horizon! Different individuals, peoples, races and nations experience their own forms of darkness and are shaken by them. The light of God in Christ discloses the sharp truth that mankind as a whole suffers from the utter darkness of vanity, sin and death. But it does more than this: it creates solidarity with the suffering. Jesus Christ identifies Himself with the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts, and the Church which is His Body must do the same. When it does so, the light is all the brighter because of the darkness round about it. In the moment of darkness the Christian sees hope; where the world sees only darkness he can see light.

A change also takes place in measurements of what the world calls light. For example, we see about us advances in the attack upon disease, poverty and ignorance; the increasing interdependence of the world; the movements of emancipation; men everywhere stirred by visions of a better tomorrow. Millions of people receive a larger share in the fruits of the earth and in the values of civilization. The Creator continues to pour out unmerited gifts on His creatures and those who are truly concerned about man, those who stand on the side of the meek and the poor, can only be grateful for this fact. Such advances, however, cannot simply be hailed as the coming of the light of dawn. New knowledge creates new dangers. Closer relations between nations frequently bring new conflict. Movements of emancipation all too often lead to new forms of oppression. Prosperity can easily make men forget how often their wealth is derived from the exploitation of others, turn them into mere defenders of their selfish interests, and blind them to the deeper issues of life and to the sufferings of others. Thus historical developments which had been greeted as bringing light carry with them much darkness. It is hard to draw the boundary between light and darkness; the light that we think is in us may be darkness, and very great darkness indeed. But we do know that the living Lord stands on that boundary, transforming night into day. He makes it clear what it is to be a man because He alone has entered the human situation in all its confusions and has perfectly fulfilled, in the midst of it, the obedience which God demands.

The place where we dwell is the place where He now commands us to witness to the world and to serve the world. It is here that He says: "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 13: 47). Given this task in this day, we become blasphemers against the light unless we allow ourselves to be taught by Him before seeking to teach others (Rom. 2: 21 to 24). And this can only mean a renewed listening to His word in Scripture and a new response to His presence in the turbulent events of our day.



THE MESSAGE

BIBLE STUDY ONE

THE GLORY OF GOD

EZEKIEL 1; GENESIS 1:1 to 4

Read Ezekiel 1

This chapter is a vision of the manifestation of the glory of God, characterised by dazzling light.

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First, the chapter has to do with the visitation of God—‘visitation’ in the sense of direct approach, almost ‘intervention’, for always when God ‘visits’ man, it is for immediate action, either in judgment or to save. Thus God acts at the turning points of history—Moses at Sinai, Elijah at Horeb, Jesus transfigured on the Mount, the little company in the upper room at Pentecost (Ex. 19, I Kings 19, Mark 9, Acts 2. Compare the ancient Jewish readings for Pentecost, Ex. 19, Hab. 3, Ps. 29, Ez. 1).

Second, this visitation in blinding light is bound up with a revelation of the utmost importance—the whole world is God’s sphere of action. Since the reformation under King Josiah it had been emphasized with exclusive vigour that only in Jerusalem could God be found. How were these exiles to find Him? They lived among a confusion of peoples, and everywhere the gods of Babylon (v. 1). Jerusalem was hundreds of miles away, and a wide desert between. Moreover, the temple was destroyed. Ezekiel is given the message the people needed. He sees the throne of God as a chariot, completely mobile. He sees four living creatures in human form (v. 5), each with four faces and four wings (v. 6). Beside each living creature, there is a double wheel, a wheel within a wheel, the inner at right angles to the outer, and there are eyes round the rims. The living creatures support a solid platform. On this platform there is a sapphire throne and upon the throne, topmost of all, a figure of dazzling light. All this means that the chariot-throne is completely mobile. The wheels can run east or west, north and south. The living creatures can fly straight ahead in any direction over mountains and across deserts. If you cannot find God, God can find you even in the place least expected. Whenever God’s people are in need of Him, He is there.

Third, there is the association of light. The prophet sees a tempest coming from the north, a vast cloud bursting with flame: brilliant light all about it (v. 4) and within it a radiance glowing in the heart of fire, burning coals, torches darting to and fro (v. 13). The wheels sparkle like chrysolite (v. 16) and the hubs shine with brilliant light (v. 18: the Hebrew has, mistakenly, 'height' and 'fear'). The vision is all flashing with fire (v. 27) and the encircling radiance is like a rainbow on a rainy day. Through this radiance, half seen and half too bright for seeing, a figure looms. Ezekiel does not say he saw God Himself; he interposes three veils – the semblance of the likeness of the glory of God.

The prophet falls prostrate in awe and worship before the dazzling light of God. Here is light beyond all human thought and sight, the uncreated light, transcendent, beyond description ('like', 'semblance', 'likeness', 'as it were'). Out of the light there comes the word, and the prophet is bidden to speak this word to the people. He witnesses to what he has seen and heard (2:3; cf. Isaiah 6:8-9). Note that when men received the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31f), they immediately witnessed. This has always been so. Ever since Pentecost, whenever men have heard the Word, whenever the Light has shined into their hearts, they have boldly declared what God has done for them. The Church is wholly dependent upon this word and vision.

Read Genesis 1 : 1 to 4

When we turn to Genesis 1, we find the same three motifs: God's visitation: the whole world is His sphere: Word and Light.

First: God's visitation resulted in the creation of the cosmos (the ordered world). God intervened and by His direct action He created order out of chaos. He separated day and night, earth and sky, land and sea. He made times and seasons. He made all living creatures; He made man. By direct action He 'visited' the patriarchs, brought Israel out of Egypt, raised up prophets and kings, sent His only Son into the World, and still He acts directly in men by the Holy Spirit.

Second: Since God created the world, there is no part of it where His power does not run. Isaiah saw God in His temple, but saw also that the whole earth was full of His glory (Isaiah 6:3). The heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (I Kings 8:27), how much less any one place.

Third: God's first word was "Let there be light". The Word of God and the Light were active together, and so it is always. Indeed the Word is the Light of the World (John 1:1-9).

Questions

1. How far does the awareness of the majesty of God have a place in (a) the worship of the Church, and (b) our personal experience? (Ez. 1, v. 28).
2. God visited His prophets and His people in a direct challenging way. Does He approach us today (a) individually, (b) corporately, in the same way? How?
3. The vision of God's glory is always accompanied by the voice calling to obedience and witness. Where for us is the necessary relation between worship and the mission of the Church?

BIBLE STUDY TWO

THE BREAK OF DAY

ISAIAH 9; 1 to 7; LUKE 4; 14 to 30

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Read Isaiah 9: 1 to 7

We begin with a people in darkness, desperately longing for the morning to come (see 8: 21 to 22). The whole Old Testament is the story of a people who were continually going through hard times, but who never gave up hope of a peculiarly glorious future. There were always some who were honest enough to admit that their troubles were due to their own fault, and that they could not rely on themselves to put things right. Nor did they trust to luck or resign themselves to fate. They believed that God would bring a new dawn, and the longer it was delayed the more urgently they longed for it.

This passage goes back to the eighth century B.C. when the northern part of Palestine was conquered by the Assyrians, a time of darkness for the people. It should probably be divided into three parts:

(1) *Verses 1, 2*: A prophecy that the conquered area will be set free. This hope of freedom from invaders was never fulfilled. But in St. Matthew (4: 12 to 16) it is described as being fulfilled in an altogether unexpected way: the light dawned for these people in Galilee when Jesus went to live among them.

(2) *Verses 3 to 5*: A thanksgiving to God for bringing victory and peace to His people. The meaning of this poem is not always clear. Verse 3 should probably read: "Thou hast increased the exultation: thou hast magnified the joy." Verse 4 recalls the victory described in Judges 6 to 8; verse 5 refers to the destruction of army boots and uniforms when peace comes.

(3) *l'erses* 6, 7: A triumphant hymn of hope about the birth and coronation of a new king of the house of David, who will rule justly and bring perpetual peace and prosperity. The phrase "to us a son is given" is perhaps a description of the king's coronation (we know that this language was used at the coronation of the king: see Psalm 2: 7, a coronation psalm). He has four titles: "wonderful counsellor", "mighty God" (perhaps we should translate "God-like hero"), "father for ever", and "prince of peace". We might add a fifth, which was often used of the king in Israel and came to be used especially of the expected deliverer: the Lord's Anointed One, or Messiah.

Read Luke 4: 14 to 30

At last, after long waiting, the true dawn comes. Jesus of Nazareth is anointed by God with His Spirit as the King who will bring the longed for day: (3: 22, where Psalm 2: 7 is quoted). He is God's Son (4: 3); God's Spirit is in Him (4: 1, 14). At first He meets with great success (4: 15).

Then He comes home. He reads a passage from Isaiah (61: 1 to 2) which tells how God anoints His Servant with His Spirit to bring joy, freedom, good health to all who are in misery. These were the expected signs of the coming of Messiah (compare Luke 7: 19 to 23); they were what Jesus did, according to all the Gospels. This is what the coming of the light means.

But it also means more. Jesus does not only read from Isaiah 61; He claims that what the prophet spoke about He is actually doing. If you want to see the dawn you must not only accept the programme; you must accept Him who carries it out (again compare Luke 7: 23). And the people of Nazareth know that Jesus is not a wonderful King but simply one of themselves. He does not seem to correspond to their Messianic hopes; He is too ordinary. If people decide beforehand what the light must be like, they will miss the true light when it dawns.

This is illustrated in all the gospels but perhaps most clearly in the story told in John 9. Here the man born blind has his eyes opened—to see the world as it really is, and to see the truth, which is Jesus Himself. The Jews on the other hand, who think that they know all about the light, are shown to be blind. To those who believe in Him Jesus brings light and salvation, and in this He shows Himself to be one with the Father (compare Psalm 27: 1). As for those who do not accept Him, His presence shows that the light they have is really darkness. This is what St. John means by *judgment* (John 9: 35 to 41; compare John 3: 16 to 21).

Questions

1. Suppose that you have been asked to give a talk on Isaiah 9 in a country under foreign rule. Gather material from current newspapers, and relate to this chapter.
2. The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness (Luke 4: 1) and back to the people (Luke 4: 14). How does the Church experience the guidance of the Holy Spirit today?
3. What prevented the people of Nazareth from walking in the light of Christ? What compelled them to try to walk in His light? How do these apply to us?
4. What do you miss if you accept the "programme" which Jesus proclaims (Luke 4: 18 to 19) but not the truth that He is the Light? What is the difference between the proclamation made by Jesus and all human programmes of relief or reform?

BIBLE STUDY THREE

THE SERVANT KING

ISAIAH 49: 1 to 7; PHILIPPIANS 2: 1 to 18

Read Isaiah 49: 1 to 7

Israel was a suffering people. That such a people with such a history could ever have survived is an astonishing fact. Fundamentally, it was a miracle of divine grace which created in the people an unshakeable faith in God, an overriding sense of destiny as His chosen people, and a living hope for a promised Messiah.

Our passage was written when they were in exile in Babylon. Humanly speaking, their faith, hope and destiny seemed to have come to an end. And yet out of this terrible suffering their faith, hope and destiny were given new height and depth through prophets such as the writer of the Songs of the Servant (Is. 42: 1 to 4, 49: 1 to 7, 50: 4 to 9, 52: 13 to 53: 12).

In our passage, the servant is speaking, but it is not a monologue. In fact, he is bidding the nations to listen in on an intimate dialogue between the Lord God and himself. Substitute if you will, for "you peoples from afar" the peoples of, say, communist China or Moslem Malaya and then ask yourself "Who is the Servant Israel?" Note the seeming absurdity of the message contained in this dialogue.

The substance of the conversation centres on four things;

1. *Verses 1 to 4.* The servant recounts his call, culminating in the express charge of the Lord "You are my Servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified". He has been destined by God for this ministry, even from his mother's womb (cf. Jer. 1: 5; Ps. 22: 10 to 11, 139: 13 to 16; Gal. 1: 15), solely to be a living witness to the Word of God—his mouth was made like "a sharp sword" with its cutting power, his whole being like "a polished arrow" for driving home to its mark. And yet he was mysteriously "hidden away" (twice repeated) as if waiting for the appointed moment.

2. *Verses 4 and 5e.* The servant experienced a sense of futility reflecting perhaps the prophet's rejection by his own people in exile. (See 50: 6, and especially Ch. 53.) But his sole confidence was in God.

3. *Verses 5abcd, 6.* In the midst of his frustration and rejection, there comes from the Lord God the further amazing charge: "I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

4. *Verses 7.* Then to the speechless servant an astonishing vision appears: a Servant-King before whom kings and princes stand up and then prostrate themselves. Through and in suffering, the Servant is the Chosen One of God, who fulfils His promise because He is the All-Faithful.

What an amazing dialogue! The prophet himself was well aware of that. "Who has believed our report?" (53: 1). That such a suffering servant might be the promised Messiah was, as it were, "hidden away" for centuries until Jesus came.

At the centre of the Bible stands Jesus who identified Himself as that Servant and who though He was God's beloved Son (Mk. 1: 11, Ps. 2: 7 and Is. 42: 1) "came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10: 45). In Him, the appointed time came and through His life, death and resurrection, the question "Who is the Servant?" was answered once for all - Jesus Christ, the Servant Lord. And the proclamation of this message by His servant-people constitutes the Church, the new Israel. The starting point of the new Israel lies in the fact that the faithfulness of God was vindicated once for all in Jesus Christ, even beyond the prophet's expectations.

Read Philippians 2: 1 to 18

Paul's letter to the Philippians is full of joy - all the more surprising as it was written in prison. But since he regarded himself as the servant of Jesus, the Servant-King, he even rejoiced in his imprisonment because it gave him the privilege of sharing the suffering of his Lord, and helped in the advancement of the Gospel (1: 12f). So again and again he said, "Rejoice in the Lord" (3: 1, 4:4).

Only one thing mars his joy - the report of disharmony in the Philippian church. Our passage begins with a passionate plea for unity, "complete my joy" (v. 1 to 4), and then it moves into the highest court of appeal for Christians: the mind of Christ (v. 5). What is this mind which we have in Jesus Christ? It is not "conceit" (v. 3). Christ did not "count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (v. 6), while Adam by contrast was tempted to become like God (Gen. 3: 5) and grasped the forbidden fruit. He did not "look to His own interests" (v. 4). He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a Servant" (v. 7). He was not self-centred (v. 3), but humbled Himself and became "obedient unto death" (v. 8). Therefore He was "exalted" (v. 9), so that every tongue should "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (v. 11).

This is a hymn (v. 6 to 11) of praise and adoration, used by the Church of Paul's time. It reveals what God is and what man is and should be. It dominated Paul's thinking about the Church and its mission. Paul follows the hymn immediately with an imperative: "Therefore . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you . . . as lights in the world" (v. 12 to 18). The humble obedience of the Servant Jesus has broken through the "No Exit" for fallen man once for all, to "the glory of God the Father" (v. 11). In union with our exalted Lord we can, in the midst of suffering, fulfil our true human destiny.

Questions

1. How can the "mind which we have in Christ Jesus", which is willingness to suffer and to die, be the source of joy? (See e.g. Is. 49: 5 to 6; Phil. 2: 9 to 11; Heb. 12: 2 to 3).
2. We are called to live by this mind and so to shine as lights in the world. Where are the shortcomings and the signs of victory in the life of your parish and in the organization of the Church? Try to answer on the basis of Phil. 2: 3 to 5, 14 to 15.
3. How does faith in the Servant-Lord change our conceptions of how power is to be used and freedom is to be gained?
4. Man wishes always and everywhere to get release from suffering. How does the message of the Servant-King answer this human desire?

BIBLE STUDY FOUR

THE LIGHT OF MEN

JOHN 1:1 to 18

Read John 1: 1 to 18

The Gospel of St. John speaks about Jesus of Nazareth. The prologue also speaks about Him. It leads us right back to "the beginning", as described in Genesis 1. Just as it is certain that the earthly life of Jesus began at a definite moment in history, so it is certain that in the beginning He was with God. This leads us to the mystery of God which no one can fully understand. Our passage speaks with reverence of this mystery. But God has not remained a dark mystery; it is precisely in Jesus Christ that He has revealed Himself and come to dwell among men. He has done so by speaking to man through the life and words of Jesus. His words become life for those who listen to Him.

Verses 1 to 5: The Word—The Life—The Light

It was God's creative Word which brought the world into existence (Genesis 1). Only through that Word does it exist. Without God's Word there is no Life for man. The apostles came to realize this through their association with Jesus. They testify this to the world and ask us whether we have found Life through Him.

We would do well to pay close attention to the relationship between the Word, the Life and the Light. Life and Light are not vague concepts which express something different to each one of us. He who hears the voice of the living God in Jesus can say: Now I know for the first time what it means to be in the Light and to have the Life. It is not by devout contemplation or by moral activism that we come to the Life and the Light. Contemplation and action are signs that we have received the Life, but its origin lies in the Word of God.

Much as people long for Light and Life, they are little inclined to receive it from Jesus. "The Light shines in the darkness." Blindness and hostility led to the crucifixion of Jesus. That is where the darkness of the world betrays itself. Much as the world longs for the Light, it was unable and unwilling to recognize the Light in the "Word of God".

Verses 9 to 13: "For All Men"

As the true Light, Jesus exists for the sake of all men. This is not to say that all men recognize him; but none is excluded from His light. We all need Him in order to escape from the darkness. He denies himself to none of us sinners. Differences of nationality, race or class disappear before Him.

It is a puzzling fact that the world does not recognize the light by which it was created. More disturbing still, even when He comes to His own home He is rejected. In the crucifixion the rejection reaches its culminating point, and it continues throughout history. Certainly the opposite also happens: that men receive Him. That is one of God's miracles which can only be compared to the miracle of human birth (John 3: 3 to 5).

At this point it becomes clear that the light of God does not call for dreamy contemplation but for a change in our lives. He who sees the light of God in faith, will not only come to a new understanding but he himself will become a new being: he will become a child of God. God's child clings to His Father in faith and love, and tries to conform his daily life to the Father's will. Effective witness to the light of the world can only be given where this change in our lives has taken place and is constantly taking place afresh.

Verses 14 to 18: Full of Grace and Truth

The greatest mystery lies in the fact that the Word has become flesh: God has become man. Certainly it is the work of His unfathomable grace that God's light has dawned in our midst and that we need not look for it at an inaccessible distance. Consider how completely our gaze is drawn to the man Jesus. Nor can we turn away our eyes from the place where the Son of God undergoes the supreme humiliation—the Cross. It is there that God's glory is revealed. We acknowledge indeed His glory in the works of creation and in the government of the world, but the greatest thing that we can say about God is that the Eternal stoops down to seek the lost.

The appearance of the true God in the world shows up the hostility of the world to God. Yet this is the moment when God, far from abandoning this hostile world, redeems it. It is only because we men think of God as a remote being that we are able to live our lives so securely. Because like Adam we think we can hide from God, life seems bearable. But what happens when we can deceive ourselves no longer? We are faced with despair. But now the true God stands in our midst—and He is the God of mercy!

Questions

1. Many people believe that all men are the children of God. What then does John mean by saying that to all who received Him Jesus gave power to become the sons of God?
2. Jesus is described as the true light that enlightens every man". Is this light to be found anywhere else in the world?
3. "The Word became flesh." Why is this the centre of our message?

And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour, when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes, saying "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

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And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was a son of God!"

MARK 15:22-39

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

LUKE 24:1-9

And ... Jesus himself stood among them ... Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem."

LUKE 24:36, 44-48

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

ACTS 1:6-8

BIBLE STUDY FIVE

THE VICTORY OF LIGHT

JOHN 12:20 to 36; COLOSSIANS 1:9 to 20

The central message of these two sections of the New Testament is that the passing from darkness to light has been accomplished by Christ through His sacrifice on the Cross. Such is the meaning of the Christian Passover; our Johannine text is definitely taken from a paschal context. Jesus is entering Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of the Jews and He explains the meaning of *His* participation in this Feast.

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Read John 12: 20 to 36

Three themes of this passage seem particularly relevant for our study:

1. The sacrifice of Christ offers salvation to all. Jesus speaks here when He is told that "certain Greeks" desire to see him. Although these Greeks appear to be Jewish proselytes (i. e., not actually pagans, cf. Acts 10: 2; 8: 27) their presence suggests that the glory of the Messiah is calling for the unity of all the nations. This was already in preparation through the world-embracing vision of Old Testament prophets and through the missionary work of the Jews then scattered around the world. This universal vision finds its fulfilment in the death of Christ:

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself".

2. We have here a description of the concept of *glory*, which is closely connected with that of *light*. The "hour" of glory is that of death (v. 23 to 24) and the "lifting up" (v. 32) contains an intentional ambiguity by referring *both* to the crucifixion and to the Messianic glorification (cf. Is. 52: 13).

3. The final opposition between *light* and *darkness* suggests that the coming of the glory does not yet put a final end to the struggle with the "prince of this world". He himself does not yet recognise his failure although he has been "cast out" by the victory of Christ (v. 31), and he still remains powerful. Every man is confronted with a choice to follow either light or darkness (v. 35 to 36). It is still possible to reject the universal salvation offered by God. But he who has chosen the light knows where he is going and begins to discern the outlines of his path. Christ's way is the way of the cross and every disciple must follow Him precisely there (v. 26).

Read Col. 1 : 9 to 20

Here Paul also interprets the passing from the “dominion of darkness” into the “kingdom of His Son” (v. 13), which again is achieved “through the blood of His cross” (v. 20) and which is the foundation of all aspects of Christian conduct (v. 9 to 11). In fact, Paul sums up his moral precepts for the Colossians by saying that they must “give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (v. 12).

Two aspects of the Apostle’s thought appear as particularly relevant for our purpose.

1. The “light” is the very element in which the redeemed are called to “walk”, giving thanks to the Father for the grace they have received. Christian behaviour therefore is based not upon laws and precepts given from outside, but upon the fact that they are “children of light” and, for them it is no longer possible to obey the power of darkness. If they do so they reject the very purpose for which they were created.

2. As in the passage from St. John, the significance of the redemptive act for all is stressed very strongly. Not only the whole of humanity, but the entire creation, is reconciled to God in Christ. His victory over death, His becoming “the head of the body, the Church” (v. 18) is the consequence of the fact that “in Him all things hold together” (v. 17). In order to emphasize this idea, Paul uses the same word in both cases: Jesus is the “*first-born* of all creation” (v. 15) and the “*first-born* from the dead” (v. 18). In other words, both our creation and our redemption have been accomplished through the same Son of God, but in two different ways (cf. I Cor. 8: 6). The final destiny of creation is to acknowledge its true and legitimate Master. The “inheritance of the saints in light” is not restricted to those who now possess it, but should become the goal of every creature: this is the very foundation of the universality of the Christian message, unlimited by any cultural or geographical boundary. By being joined to Christ, man realizes the destiny for which he was created.

We saw that the unity of these two passages lies in a common conception of the Cross as the way of the passing from darkness to glory and light. This is why since the beginning one of the most common terms to designate *baptism* has been “enlightenment”, although the rite consisted in immersion, symbolizing death and resurrection with Christ (cf. Rom. 6: 1 to 11; and probably Heb. 6: 4). In accepting, through baptism, the way of Christ to the very depth of His humiliation and sacrifice, every Christian inherits the dignity of a child of light.

Questions

1. What, in your own life and your local community, are the forms of opposition to Christ which are most similar to those described in John 12: 20 to 36? What does “losing our lives” mean in dealing with these oppositions?

2. How far does the Church in your local situation bear a full witness to the universal character of the Christian message?

3. What does it mean that “everything was created through him and for him” (Col. 1: 16)? How does the claim that Christ is the Lord of all creation (nature, world, history) affect our proclamation of the Gospel and our attitudes towards society?

4. What is the real significance of baptism in the usage of your church? How far does it accord with what is implied about baptism in the message of these passages?

BIBLE STUDY SIX

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

II CORINTHIANS 4:1 to 6; 5:14 to 21

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In this whole section of his letter (3: 1 to 6: 10) Paul sets forth his account of the ministry of the new covenant which God has made with men through Jesus Christ. That covenant is conveyed to men through the ministry of the Church: those who share in that ministry share in God's glory, and thus in His light.

Read II Cor. 4: 1 to 6

In *verses 2 to 6* light is the connecting thought. Can the group work out for itself the way in which this theme is expressed in the various verses?

In *verse 4* Paul suggests that some people are unable to see the light. Why do they not recognize the glory of God in the cross of Jesus Christ? Compare John 12: 31 and Col. 1: 13 and the comment in Study 2, 5.

In *verse 5* the ministers of this new covenant of glory are described as "servants". This is not mere politeness, but is closely connected with the meaning of "glory". God bestowed His glory on Christ because He humiliated Himself and became a servant for our sakes (see Phil. 2: 7 and comment in Study 3; see also Mark 10: 45, where Jesus says He has come to "minister"). Thus the ministers of the new covenant are themselves servants and slaves, as Christ was.

In *verse 6* Paul makes explicit the connection between the old creation and the new. He refers to Genesis 1: 3 "And God said, let there be light." Just as in the beginning God commanded His light to shine in the darkness, so in Christ He has given His new light to shine in the darkness of men's hearts. Verse 6 therefore described the transformation of the whole personality through intimate fellowship with God in Christ. It is important to notice here that when Paul says "our hearts" he does not

mean only “my heart”. He is referring to the experience of all Christians, in the course of which what God effected through the life, death and resurrection of Christ is applied to each new individual, beginning with baptism and continuing in the life of faith in the Church. This new creation is possible because Christ is the “likeness of God” (v. 4). Man was originally created in God’s image (Gen. 1: 26). Now that image is fully restored and revealed in Christ. In Him we know what God intends men to be (see Rom. 8: 29 and I Cor. 15: 47 to 49).

Read II Cor. 5: 14 to 21

Verses 14 to 21 deal with the ministry of reconciliation: it begins with God’s act in Christ for the world, and this passage shows how this ministry comes to us today.

Verse 14: “one has died for all”: Christ’s death affects the whole of humanity. We are all “dead” in Christ (compare Col. 3: 3)—Christ took upon himself the whole of humanity. He took all that men are upon himself, including our sin (see verse 21, below).

Verse 16: “from a human point of view after the flesh” (KJV): Paul maintains that an “objective”, “purely historical” or “outsider’s” view of Christ is totally insufficient. Only the eye of faith can see in the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth the supreme manifestation of God’s wisdom and power (see I Cor. 1: 25).

Throughout this epistle we must be careful not to interpret the first person plural “we” exclusively of Paul. The meaning varies in a remarkable way: sometimes it means “we ministers” (as in 4: 1); sometimes “we Christians” (as in v. 16); sometimes “we men” (as in v. 18—“who has reconciled us”). This reflects the fact that Paul is at one and the same time a minister of the new covenant, a member of the Church, and a man. The ministry of reconciliation affects all three classes. Similarly in Isaiah 49: 1 to 7 it is difficult to decide whether the Servant is an individual or a group.

Verse 20: Here God does not command, but entreats with the compulsion of love (see v. 14). The ministers, therefore, who are carrying out God’s work in Christ, do not command, but entreat. Notice how all human ideas of authority and power are revolutionised by the amazing work of God on the Cross. God has not abdicated from the seat of authority, but he has completely reversed our conception of how authority is exercised.

Verse 21: Here is the most extreme statement of God’s identification of Himself with men that we find anywhere in the Bible. God came in Christ as near as is conceivable to the position of sinners without Himself being guilty of sin (see Romans 8:3 to 4).

Questions

1. In what sense has all mankind died in Christ (see verses 14 to 15)? Why should we view His coming as nothing less than a new creation (see 4: 6, 5: 17)?

2. Who exercises the ministry of reconciliation in the Church today, and how? What does reconciliation with God mean?

3. What is the relationship between evangelism and reconciliation (v. 20)? Between reconciliation and social witness? At what points on your own locality is the ministry of reconciliation most needed?

BIBLE STUDY SEVEN

JUSTICE AND LOVE

ISAIAH 58:1 to 12; I JOHN 1:5 to 2:11

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In the previous study we have seen that those who come to the light of Jesus Christ enter into a new relationship with God and their fellow men. In this study we shall endeavour to see the fruits of this reconciliation.

In the Old Testament the great prophets of personal and social righteousness proclaimed the demands of a Holy God who expected His people to be holy (compare also Leviticus 19; I Peter 1: 16), and who required justice and mercy in human conduct (Micah 6: 8).

In New Testament times, especially during the period when St. John wrote, great dangers to Christian truth had arisen not only from the outside but from those inside who, under the influence of certain prevailing ideas, had begun to put their trust in certain supposed divine secrets, rather than faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ, and who even deliberately practised evil as a means of enlarging their experience.

With these preliminary considerations let us now turn to our passages.

Read Isaiah 58: 1 to 12

There are few passages in the Old Testament which bring out more clearly the implication of true worship. Here the prophet is told by the Holy God to denounce the sins of his people who, after the exile, combined the formal practice of religion with social vices of greed, cruelty and hypocrisy. The passage is almost in the form of a dialogue in which a conversation takes place between God and His people, though the narrator of this controversy is God Himself.

God Himself rebukes the people for the mere formality of their religion. The people retort and accuse God of not taking notice of their fasting and self-mortification. Then God shows them how they have deceived themselves about their piety. The fast should consist in giving bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, hospitality to the homeless. Then only will God hear their prayers and will a new dawn shine upon the people. True worship requires the practice of justice and mercy. This is a primary condition for the reconstruction and prosperity of the nation.

Read I John 1 : 5 to 2 : 11

Here the Apostle begins with a great affirmation: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." Communion with Him means a common participation in His light. The Church is thus a fellowship in the light of God. This does not mean, however, that we become incapable of committing sin; but living in communion with God and one another, we are driven to the acknowledgement of our sin in contrition, with the full assurance that the blood of Jesus which was shed to take away our sins will cleanse us. Participation in the light of God produces sincere repentance, which consists not only in thoughts or feelings but also in reparation, restitution and acts of love.

In the second chapter the Apostle again stresses the seriousness of sin. But if we do sin, Christ the righteous has made an offering on our behalf and this the Father accepts. This forgiveness is available to all men because Christ died for the whole world. The recognition of this truth is the basis of Christian evangelism to all men, to the end of the earth.

The commandments to love God and our neighbour are found in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19: 18; Deuteronomy 6: 4), but in Jesus we have their fulfilment. If love does not flow from our life to others, we are still in darkness, and have not appropriated the light of God, which is love. This love is not sentimental or limited human love, but the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ. Only in this sense can we say that where there is God there is love, and where there is love there is light. This is the light in which we are called to walk, and this is the basis of the unity of the Church and the source of its witness and service to the world.

Questions

1. What opportunities does your congregation have for obeying the teaching contained in Isaiah 58: 6, 7? Does this include bringing the homeless into your own homes?
2. What does Isaiah 58: 1 to 12 teach us about true worship? What are the dangers in the Church's liturgical life today?
3. What is true Christian confession of sin (I John 1: 9)? How real are the acts of confession which we continually use in church services as well as in private devotions?
4. In the two passages we have studied, light and fellowship are deeply connected. What has this connection to say about
 - a) Christian unity
 - b) The Church's evangelistic responsibility?

BIBLE STUDY EIGHT

THE GLORIOUS CITY

REVELATION 21: 1 to 5; 21: 22 to 22: 5; MATTHEW 5: 14 to 16

The New Jerusalem

Read Revelation 21: 1 to 5; 21: 22 to 22: 5

1. *On the tossing waves.*

John is an exile on the island of Patmos for Christ's sake (Rev. 1: 9). The churches of Asia are suffering persecution. Has the turmoil of history any ultimate meaning? It looks as if the powers of darkness were to win the day; is not the love of the churches growing cold (Rev. 2: 4 cf. Mt. 24: 9 to 12)? Will they not be driven to apostasy? Who controls history, God or Caesar? These are questions which haunt the faithful.

God answers. The Risen Lord appears to John in glorious array, — *Christus Imperator* (Rev. 1: 9 to 20). He, not Caesar, holds the keys of death and Hades. There follows a stern message of both light and doom: the hardest struggles are still to come! The small vessel of the Church will go on being tossed on the wild waves of history. But the light of the resurrection shines on it, the Creator of heaven and earth and the Spirit in His sevenfold energies, watch over it (Rev. 2 to 4), and the heavenly Jerusalem fills the horizon (Rev. 21 to 22). *God is Lord*. Therefore *history has meaning*. It is not an endless succession of ups and downs, not a cyclic process, a turning wheel. God is present in every congregation. He dominates the world's struggle through the power of the Cross.

2. *The consummation.*

The new heaven and the new earth for which the prophets of old have been waiting are of God's own making. Suffering and death are no more, all things are made new (Rev. 21: 1 to 6 cf. Is. 65: 17 to 25). The Holy City comes from above, adorned with sparkling life and beauty (Rev. 21 cf. Is. 60). God's glory is its light and the Lamb its "lamp". Christ is the faithful witness through whom God's light has come to men and men have been drawn to him.

The "Lamb" is a key word in the terminology of John the Seer (cf. 5: 7; 9 to 17; 12: 11; 14: 1). The image is rooted in the Old Testament: the lamb "without blemish" is offered in sacrifice (Lev. 1: 10; I Pet. 1: 19); the blood of the paschal lamb saves Israel from destruction (Ex. 12; I Cor. 5: 7), the suffering Servant of Isaiah dies as a lamb led to the slaughter (Is. 53: 7; Acts 8: 30 to 32; John 1: 29). In Revelation the Lamb is no weak figure: He is "the Lion of Judah" (5: 5); He bears the marks of His slaughter, but as One who has conquered; He is all-powerful, all-seeing, worthy to be worshipped as God Himself (5: 6 to 14). He is the true Shepherd (7: 13 to 17 cf. Ps 23, John 10: 14 to 18). He is the Lord who knocks

at the door eager to break bread with His people (3:20), the Bridegroom celebrating the marriage feast with His Church (19:9). He is the sovereign Judge of nations (cf. Mt. 25:31 to 32) who shares the throne of God. The Cross is the sole power by which all the powers of this world will be overcome, --and it is the power of redeeming love. *It is the slain Lamb who solves the riddle of history.*

The City needs no temple—because it is flooded with God’s holy presence. The Lord is high priestly prayer is fulfilled: all are one in the same adoration (John 17:20 to 26). And from the Holy City light shines into the world: its gates are open and “the nations” walk into it, bringing in all the peculiar gifts and treasures God has bestowed on them. Access to the tree of life is free (cf. Gen. 3:22 to 24) and its leaves are “for the healing of the nations”. This is *the consummation*.

Of this glorious city the faithful are already citizens; the Lord sustains His Church by His Spirit in her daily battle, He feeds her with Word and Sacrament. The songs of deliverance and praise of the saints of all ages are part of the heavenly liturgy that John in his exile was given to hear.

A City on a Hill

Read Matthew 5: 14 to 16

In Palestine one finds little villages clustered on the top of a hill; they are seen from afar, the traveller cannot miss them. Jesus used this image: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.” Jesus does not say “you should be” or “you shall be”. He says “*you are*”. It belongs to the very nature of the Church to radiate His light. Where Jesus is, there the Spirit is at work and there the *light shines* for the world to see. Works are done which bear the marks of their origin so that those who see them will “give glory to the Father”. To whom does Jesus say this (see Mt. 5: 1 to 12; Luke 18: 9 to 14)?

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Questions

1. Is your local Christian community that sort of “city on a hill” of which Jesus speaks? If not, what is lacking in your witness, your service and your common life?

2. How does the “lamp” shine in your home?

3. The prophet sees God as present in history, leading it to its goal. What does this mean for the churches’ interpretation of present events? How does the Christian view of history compare with others held in your own surroundings? (a Hindu’s? an animist’s? a Marxist’s? a scientist’s? a journalist’s?)

4. What does the image of the victorious Lamb suggest about our current reliance on other kinds of power? Is there a conflict between the power of the State, the power of money, the power of organization and the power of God? Does my church, or do I, use these powers of the World? Is it legitimate to do so (cf. Study III)?

“We give thanks to thee, Lord God almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign” ... (Rev. 11: 17). In what ways have we heard echoes of this hymn all through our studies, discussions and prayers (cf. also 5: 13; 15: 3 to 4)?

THE WAY

Christianity throughout the world is facing a crisis as great as any which has come upon it in the course of its history. In the past hundred years every one of its traditional foundations has been exposed to the most searching criticism. Christians are being compelled to face challenges to their basic beliefs which seem greater even than those in the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Large numbers of people in both East and West are convinced that modern man has simply outgrown religion altogether. A new kind of secularism has developed which considers the Christian faith as outdated and unintelligible. Any real concern with God is discarded as irrelevant. Many consider this attitude a kind of liberation. Some put their hope in science. Others simply accept what they call the absurdities of life, and many are lost in meaninglessness and despair.

We live in the midst of this situation, and are vulnerable to it, yet we repeat: Christ is the Light of the World. He reveals to us the true nature of God, the true nature and destiny of man, and also the stern realities of the world in which we live. What does this mean?

See Bible
Study 8
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The world is God's creation. It is the object of His redeeming love. It is at the same time the place where this love is constantly denied (see Bible Study 4). His light in Christ shines in and through the Church. This must surely mean that those who are members of the Church have access to a power they scarcely dream of. If this were not true, it would be absurd even to talk about the task of the Church, for the powers against it would be too great. The Church indeed is part of the Gospel, because God continues His work through it. He has decided to use us, and has taken us out of darkness into His marvellous light. No other light is strong enough to cope with the darkness. Only Christ has done so. He has overcome the darkness, and has elected us to do the same.

See Bible
Study 5

The Christian, therefore, is a realist who, standing in Christ's light, can face things as they are, for he knows of Christ's victory gained over the powers of darkness. To walk in the light implies a discernment of things and of spirits which enables the Christian to see his way through the intricacies of life. The presence of the light is an assurance that he belongs to a new creation, despite the power of sin.

See Bible
Study 3

This means that, as the Bible Studies have shown us, we must take seriously the sharpness of the contrast between light and darkness (see I Jn. 1: 5 and Bible Study 7). If we look at Golgotha, that terribly public spot, we see this contrast in its sharpest form. Darkness is what blinds men to God's presence. It is the self-love which makes men think that they do not need his compassionate love. It is the drive for power and wealth which makes the Cross look like nothing but weakness and poverty. It is the coldness of men who represent the right ancestry, the elite class, the strongest nations, the holiest religion, and who think therefore that they should rule the world. Darkness

is the fear which sees in death the end of hope. This kind of darkness surrounds us and is in us all, and it cannot tolerate the light of Christ. When we choose the light, we take a stand against this darkness.

It is not easy to do this. The Devil is clever, and makes these forms of darkness look like light. We must examine ourselves to see to what extent these forms of darkness exist in our own lives and in our own churches. We must ask ourselves whether our talk about unity and our present ways of witnessing to people and serving them are really worthy of the light we have seen in Christ. Is there not a good deal of concealed self-love and idleness and even pride about them? Is our faith something that we repose in too comfortably, something that we want for ourselves because it will give us peace of mind or security for our nation and for our incomes, something that will protect us from our enemies instead of reconciling us to them (see Isaiah 58: 2.)?

Christ cuts through such self deception, such darkness, with His absolute claim. This claim is of particular importance in our present world, where many ideologies and "isms" and many religions compete with one another for the loyalty of men. Christ stands above these. Although the Christian attitude toward their adherents is one of attention and respect, Christ cannot be mixed up with other gods and loyalties, unless these loyalties are under Him and serve Him. This means that we cannot offer Him as one of the many ingredients of a "world religion". It means that we cannot say, "One belief is as good as another." It means that Christ stands beyond all false or partial claims, whether these be of Western civilization or European culture or Americanism, and that we cannot use Him as a tribal god to support those things which are valuable to us. At the same time, we approach the great world religions with genuine understanding and strive to discover the sources of their power.

The absolute claim of Jesus, therefore, requires love toward those who are a part of the world scene and do not as yet put their faith in him. Many Christians are aware, and we should all be more aware than we are, that we have often shown intolerance in the past, both among ourselves and toward others. The love of Christ demands that we deal with fuller understanding as person to person with those who disagree with us, even on the deepest things. Moreover, loyalty to Christ does not justify us in withdrawing from the world in order to keep ourselves safe. There is no safety in retreating out of the world into a small community of the Church. Although it means danger and risk, life is to be found only by going out into the world and letting our light, which is Christ, shine before men. Our unity, our witness and service are for the world, in steadfast loyalty to our Lord.

We may, however, shrink back, because the world is so hostile. It has always been so. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Yet, it can well be argued that the modern industrialised world, especially of the west, is particularly far from the world of the Bible, and that it is very difficult for us to make the Biblical faith understood. That is true. The minds of men steeped in the scientific and technological categories of this culture are so shaped as to make it very hard for them to come to terms with the Biblical message. There is a gap here, and it is one of the most urgent tasks of the Church in the present world to bridge it. Yet if this is true, it is also true

that movements in modern history and life bring us very close to the Bible. Through persecution and war, through deliberate and massive rejection of God, through the social and scientific revolutions of our time, men are forced to face anew the unescapable question whether this life has any meaning. When this is true, the world which seems hostile is actually close to the Bible, for it is to these ultimate conditions of the soul that the Bible speaks. In whatever situation we may be, it is the mission of the Church to enter into its surrounding world. This will require listening afresh to God's word in Bible study and prayer, examining many long cherished principles. It will require forms of action which will make the churches look very different from the way they do now.

There are already, in fact, many signs of power and renewal, of the Holy Spirit working in new ways as well as old. Most of us ought to know more about them than we do.

See Bible
Study 2

These are a few of them: a rediscovery of the Bible, a movement towards unity, renewed power in evangelism, restored depth and meaning to worship and liturgy, and awakening among the laity concerning their place in the life and purpose of the Church. These evidences of renewal reach their greatest depth when they lead to solidarity with the suffering of men, when they show that the Church takes upon itself the role of a servant. The motive for them all is God's love in Christ, His light which ought to be shining through us wherever we are. New missions to industry, for example, and new forms of service in the industrial world have all arisen because some men have cared about their neighbours in industry more than most Christians usually do. The same is true, to take another example, where Christians have gone to heal and to teach among the poverty of the villages of Asia and Africa. The light of Christ fails to shine in the world today as effectively as it might because all too many of the sinners whom He has chosen still remain unfaithful to Him, unwilling to walk in His light. He suffered for me, and walking in His light means suffering too. Christ still suffers wherever men suffer; and we are called to enter into that suffering ourselves. Plain idleness and disobedience to the heavenly vision are still, as they always have been, the great enemies of light.

But human suffering is always concrete, one thing in one place and another in another. The personal side of suffering is bound up with its social causes. What does Christian solidarity with suffering mean in the thousand different ways and circumstances in which that suffering surrounds the churches? We need God's light illumining our intellects as well as our wills, giving us wisdom, as well as making us obedient. This does not mean that we can expect to find answers to all the great problems; but we can in some measure discern, as we tackle them, where the true light and the true darkness lie. In His light we shall see light.

As we are led, in this period of renewal in the life of the churches, to ask again about the meaning of our decision for God in Christ, the One Light, and about our mission in the world of darkness and suffering, we are required to ask also what big issues in the modern world present the most urgent dilemmas for Christian life and conscience. We select three, not as an exhaustive analysis of the world in which we live, but as factors in the present scene which profoundly affect human life.



First is the rapid development and spread throughout the world of science and technology and the fact that while they give great blessings they call forth a false worship. They provide vast benefits for health, for well-being and for the achievement of basic human dignity. They are weapons in the battle for justice. They are surely the fulfillment in part of the Divine Command to be fruitful and replenish the earth. They are, however, the occasion among men of a widespread and destructive idolatry. In part because the benefits from science and technology are so large, men worship the very processes of science, saying that our human problems will be solved by scientific advance. Men want possessions, and modern technology makes possessions available in unlimited supply and variety. Men are dazzled by the prospect, and become captive to the whole process, giving themselves to the religion of "more and better".

The result is a secular materialism, sometimes coated with religion, sometimes not. It is typical of the "post-Christian" era, especially in the West, that modern developments in the realms of education, psychology and the social sciences etc., which grew on Christian soil, tend now to become self-sufficient and to forget their roots. No single group is responsible for this result, the scientists perhaps least of all. We are all caught up in the deep ambiguity of the world, in a modern form of darkness by which men are blinded. The poignancy of the dilemma is illustrated by the attitude of many in the countries which are not technologically fully developed. They point to the highly developed countries and say, "We do not want that kind of materialism". Yet they also proceed as quickly as possible, in the name of justice and human dignity, to increase the productive capacity of their own countries through the most advanced technological means. Their dilemma is

one example of many such dilemmas faced by men today. What help can Christians give in this dilemma, out of their knowledge of Biblical truth concerning light and darkness, Creation and Redemption, the Servant and His People?

See Bible
Studies 2, 7

Second, social change appears in the modern world as a means of securing freedom and justice and as a process which brings new tyrannies and injustices. This is always true, but the rapidity of social change in our time makes the dilemma an urgent one, for freedoms and un-freedoms, justices and injustices appear at the same time in the same processes of change. Rapid industrialisation in predominantly agricultural societies destroys old values and produces cities in which men are lost and in which their moral standards go to pieces. Rapid political independence produces vast problems for leadership and the electorate as well. It does no good to say that things should have been organized differently, that industrialisation should have come slowly, that independence should have been better prepared for. The dilemmas are here. Should the pace of social change be hastened? What of the human wreckage that will follow? Should the pace of social change be retarded? What of the urgent need for justice now? The acceleration of social change, in the West as well as in Asia, Africa and Latin America, is one of the most far-reaching factors in the life of modern men.

Third, there is the dilemma of the growth of unity and the growth of conflict at the same time in modern history. Every nation has its political and economic relationships with many other nations. There is thus a unity, in the sense of interdependence, in our present world scene. But this interdependence has not produced peace. Within it conflict has risen to new proportions. Men create small, protective communities for their own security—nationalisms and alliances and blocs—but these harden the conflict. Moreover, the means of atomic war are of such dimensions that it is generally felt that old concepts of a “just war,” and many would say even of a “limited war” with atomic weapons, have been outgrown and are no longer applicable. What can Christians do? It is too easy an answer to say, “Support the United Nations.” The question is, what policy shall my nation stand for in all its relationship including the United Nations?

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See Bible
Studies 3, 8

That raises for the Christian the question how far a nation can follow a policy directed by moral principles, or whether it must always be guided by self-interest. Can Christians be satisfied with the argument that self-interest dictates now that nations sacrifice in order to have peace? Bible Study 6 deals with reconciliation. In what sense is this Biblical understanding of reconciliation applicable to international conflict? Our faith demands loyalty to One Lord. Does that faith contribute to our understanding of unity among nations? It is said of the Servant that He shall bring forth justice. In what way does this justice contribute to the establishment of unity among the peoples and nations? Within the scene, Christians are asked to bear witness to light. This means that our customary ideas of the mission of the Church are sharply challenged by the speed and complexity of social change. What forms of witness to Christ and service to Christ and unity in Christ are required in these new conditions?

The churches are in a time of rediscovery of their message and of renewal of life. What must be done? We must witness as we are given grace and power to witness, whether or not we have the answers to the large and complex problems of our time. It is important that we help to increase the discussion in the Church concerning them, and this booklet is an invitation to enter this discussion more fully. We must continue our search of the Scriptures, for they contain wisdom that we have not yet attained. In particular, we must make every attempt—especially because we live at such a distance from the world of the Bible—to listen to what it says to us, and not to read into it what we want or hope to find there. If we listen, it will speak. Yet our witness and our search will not be fruitful unless we come to terms with the first requirement of the Gospel, which is “Repent”. It is to the repentant heart and the repentant community that the Spirit comes to enlighten and to empower. For repentance itself is a gift of the Spirit.

We speak of “the churches”. But we would not be taking part in the ecumenical movement at all if we did not believe that there is in a real sense only One Church, holy, catholic, apostolic. We do not have to create this Church—Christ has done that on the Cross and by His Resurrection—but we must manifest it and show it forth as clearly as we can. We differ as to what we would say about that Church, but we know that it exists, and that we do find in it an assurance and a purpose that we find nowhere else. That is why we are to bring that Church to those who do not have it. We would not dare to do so if we did not believe that the Church does not belong to us, but to its Lord, Jesus Christ.

And so we come back to where we began—with the claim and promise of Jesus Christ our Lord. “I am the Light of the World; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life.”



WITNESS

The Bible passages which we have studied call us to obedience to Jesus Christ. This requires witness, service and unity. It is through these that the light of God in the face of Jesus Christ illumines the world. It is He to whom our testimony is given and who, as the risen Lord, gives power to our witness. It is He whose light illumines our service, and enables us to reflect His light to the world. It is He who gives us the unity which we must manifest. This is emphasized again and again in the New Testament. The development of these three themes below presupposes the Biblical studies in the foregoing chapter. The pages that follow contain materials which you may find helpful in undertaking the kind of things which have been chosen for discussion at the Assembly by your representatives.

SERVICE

It will soon be discovered that witness involves both word and deed and that it is affected by the unity or disunity among Christians and churches. Witness both leads to and requires unity and service. All three subjects are interrelated in this fashion and a good case could have been made for putting any one of them first. For the same reason each of them points us back to the common calling of the Church in Jesus Christ.

UNITY



WITNESS

God's Witness

God is light. He whose eternal power is shown in creation has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ claimed to be the Light of the world, He declared that the Father who sent Him bore witness to Him; this same testimony is borne by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 8: 12 to 19; 1 Jn. 5: 6 to 11). As the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Church is created by God to show forth this witness in the world. Only through the Holy Spirit can Christian witness be borne. God is thus His own witness.

See Bible
Study 4

The Church bears witness through its very existence: in worship, fellowship, and service, in the personal and family life of its members, in the proclamation of the Word and even in its silence. By the free action of His grace, God has created heaven and earth, sustains all things, and rescues men, thus reconciling the world to Himself—that His name may be glorified. That God is doing this in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is the truth on which Christian witness is based.

Therefore, when men find their true destiny in Jesus Christ, they share in this divine action. They discover themselves to be members of the fellowship whose calling is to herald the Good News. Their message is the proclamation of God's mighty acts; their calling is to show forth the Lordship of Christ; and their hope is the coming of the Kingdom.

What meanings do you attach to the word "witness"? Is personal experience indispensable for witnessing (I Jn. 1: 3)? Can we escape from witnessing to ourselves, our opinions, our institutions, or our achievements? What happens when these become substitutes for the Gospel?

God's World

The world in which we witness is God's world. When we say "world", we have in mind the cataclysmic changes which are being produced by the struggle for racial equality, economic justice, and national dignity. We have in mind the scientific and technological work which splits the atom, penetrates outer space, and transforms agriculture and industry. We have in mind the bad and the good, the hopeful and the frightful, the two faces which the world shows to all of us.

Take the fear and frustration which millions of us feel in our inability to influence the course of political events in a nuclear age. In the face of such fear, how can we first hear the Gospel and then proclaim its promise and hope?

Take our helplessness and isolation when we are subjected to the tyrannies of governments, arbitrary police power and one-sided propaganda. How do we witness in such situations and how do we support fellow Christians who are witnessing?

Take the indignation which millions of us feel at social and racial injustices which can be removed. As part of its total witness can the Church discern the righteous judgments of God in today's rebellions? How can these judgments be distinguished from merely human judgments?

Take the hunger and homelessness of millions of us. How does the Church find its place with its Lord among the poor, the outcast, and the victims of natural disasters? What forms of witness are appropriate here?

Take the pleasant life which many of us live as Christians. Our needs have been met. We are satisfied with ourselves. We comfortably say that we walk in the light. How does God break through our complacency with His witness? How does He use the world for this purpose?

Take the art, the films, the novels being produced in our countries with their pictures of the world and the Church. What insights do they give into the human situation? How is our witness to Christ involved in our response to them and our use of them?

Take the hopes and fears of the folk in our own town, on our own street. Do we share in their hopes and fears? In what ways does our witness bind us to their future more than to our own past?

Take any picture of the world you wish. It is our world, but it is first God's world. He has not abandoned it or abdicated. He sustains it, loves it, judges and redeems it. It is His plan that His light shall penetrate to the ends of the earth and to every depth in human life.

See Bible
Study 6

God's People

God has called into being a people to witness to His light in the world. The Church, as the New Israel, has inherited this task from the people of God under the Old Covenant (1 Pet. 2: 9 to 10). It is to witness not only to God's mighty acts of redemption in the past, but also to His present work in the world, and to the Kingdom yet to come (Jn. 5: 17 to 19; Phil. 3: 20; 1 Pet. 3: 15). This it does both in its own congregational life and in the daily life and work of its members (Mt. 5: 13 to 16).

See Bible
Study 5

The Church has been commissioned to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28: 19). This means that the local witness of every congregation is part of the total mission to the ends of the earth. It also means that in obedience to this command, Christians are called to cross cultural, national, and other boundaries in proclaiming the Gospel to all mankind. Are only a few members of your congregation really concerned "to support missions" in other countries? If so, why? Are Christians from other countries and races given an integral place in the prayers, witness, service and fellowship of your church? How could your congregation strengthen its direct links with the missionary task of the Church in some other part of the world? Is the possibility of a call to service in another part of the world kept before the members of your congregation?

See Bible
Study 3

Much has been said about the layman as the spearhead of the Church's witness. In fact, most church members seem unaware of their responsibility. They act as though this could be delegated entirely to the paid worker and the professional ministry. How can your church learn from and share in recent movements in which the ministry of the laity is being restored?

What are the obstacles which hinder witness? Failure in communication is one. All too often witness is in language and in forms which people do not understand. How can we use everyday speech and ideas to interpret the Gospel? What use should be made of modern means of communication, such as films, television and radio? What special forms of witness are required in different communities, such as industry? What steps do we deliberately take to share in the lives and interests of those to whom we would witness, in order to be intelligible and relevant to them?

Other difficulties, however, arise from personal reluctance.

Some say, "I have little opportunity of speaking about the Gospel, so I cannot be a witness." But good work in his job and service to his fellow-workers and the community is in fact part of any Christian's witness. What help does your church give with the real problems of witness in daily work?

Some say, "I don't know enough to witness". How should your church prepare its members to give a clear account of their faith in words and deeds—in political, economic, social, religious and personal matters? Others say, "We are not worthy to be witnesses." No Christian can regard himself as worthy, but he is enjoined to walk worthily of his vocation (Eph. 4: 1). God uses the most unworthy servants.

Many say, "What right have I to interfere with the lives of other people? Does it matter what a man believes, provided he honestly endeavours to live up to his particular faith?" It is not a question of interference. Every man has a right to know what God has done for him, and to have the opportunity of faith in Christ.

On the other hand, failure to witness also results from fear that, through conformity with the world, the church may lose its real identity. Can a church recognize its solidarity with the world, and yet make its distinctive Christian witness?

When a church is being renewed through the Spirit (Rom. 12: 2; Eph. 3: 14 to 19), its members will have to take a new look at its whole life, including its organization and methods of working. Do the patterns of your existing church life hinder communication between the church and society around it? If so, how can these hindrances be removed?

One Witness

Our Lord prayed "that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us so the world may believe that Thou hast sent me" (Jn 17: 21). Unity is essential to the Gospel of the one Lord and the one people (I Cor. 1: 10 to 13). God is continually calling this one people to make one witness to Himself. It is to the one Lord that witness is borne and this constitutes the unity of the witness. In what sense does division mean the loss of the gospel in our witness? It is sometimes stated that our many denominations result in a more widespread dissemination of the gospel. What have you to say to that statement?

Is the witness of the church where you live hindered or denied (a) by quarrels within the congregation, by tensions such as those between laity and clergy, men and women, older and younger generations, or by distinctions of class, caste or race, and (b) by separation of denominations and confessions? How are you and your fellow-Christians in your area making the one witness? What more could you do together? What is standing in your way? Why is it that some of the churches in Asia and Africa have a greater sense of the urgency of the one witness so that they are moving towards church union more rapidly than many of the churches in the West?

At the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi, the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches will become one body. What effects should this have on the oneness of our witness to the world and to our own locality? What must this mean for our church structures, our intercession, giving of money and personal service? Does this make you reconsider your ideas about God's action in His world?



SERVICE

The Idea of Service

For Christians, service in the world is the indispensable response to the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ. In obedience to the Holy Spirit all Christians are called to service. But such service is sometimes inadequately understood.

Some understand service—only in subordination to witness, and value it only when it evidently proclaims Christ;

—only as service to individuals in need, and ignore the lack of social justice which causes the need;

—only as the service of Christians by Christians in Christian institutions;

—only in so far as they can engage in public affairs with “clean hands”.

Would you agree that these are inadequate concepts of service? In what way are your own ideas of service apt to be limited?

To serve is part of the daily life both of individual Christians and of the churches. The daily work of the individual is more than a means of livelihood—it is service of the community. The churches are called to reach out effectively into the world through their efforts to serve in social structures.

Service develops when understanding of the Bible is matched with the actual needs, dilemmas and opportunities of people. We shall examine both the understanding and the needs and opportunities, and apply the result to the concept of service.

The Biblical Understanding of Service

See Bible
Study 2

Jesus described in the words of the prophet Isaiah His service to the captive, the blind and the oppressed, showing clearly that proclaiming the gospel meant at the same time doing these things (Is. 61: 1 to 2; Lk. 4: 18 to 22). He expected His followers not only to proclaim the gospel but also to feed the hungry, to welcome the stranger and to visit the sick and imprisoned, and He said, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt. 25: 31 to 46). Must we not confess that we have been so blind as not to see Him in those who are in need? Convention and custom make it hard to follow the example of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 30 to 37). Such acts, which have a humanitarian value in themselves, also reflect and commend the larger and deeper love that calls them forth.

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Just as Christ said that He did not come to be served but to serve, even to the point of death, so we are obliged to serve our fellow men unselfishly and without discrimination (Mt. 20: 28; Jn. 13: 12 to 17).

See Bible
Studies 3, 6

For Paul the renewal of life through the Resurrection and the continuing acts of the Holy Spirit mean that we must identify ourselves with suffering and sin of our fellow men, following the example of Christ (II Cor. 5: 14 to 21; Phil. 2: 1 to 8). God, through Christ, reconciled us to Himself and entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. Often this service can only be fulfilled if Christians are ready to suffer.

See Bible
Study 7

In John's teaching we learn that love is light, and that those who walk in Christ's light have fellowship with one another, and ought to walk in the way He walked (I Jn. 1: 5 to 2: 11).

We serve out of thankfulness, obedience, and love, but we are also fellow-sufferers (Is. 58: 1 to 12). The risen Christ gives power to do His work in the world. Moreover we are called not only to serve as individuals but also in and through the Church.

Forms of Service in the Modern World

The kinds of service to which the New Testament directly refers have been continued through the history of the church (II Cor. 9: 1 to 15). Our age challenges the churches to additional kinds of service because it is convulsed by changes, some of which offer man great possibilities for the mastery of

nature and the advance of the standard of living. Yet they threaten him through their economic and social pressure, and the ever-changing industrial pattern of urban life.

Some changes advance human co-operation. Others lead to disunity and conflict. Men fear actual annihilation. They are torn by national loyalties. They interfere in each other's affairs to create strife. They set adrift as victims millions of refugees.

So today the churches must risk new forms of world-wide sharing and service in order to be obedient to Christ.

It cannot be denied that the modern world of science and large-scale industry gives men powers they have never had before. Because of sin men abuse these new opportunities. But God is at work in the changes. We must try to see how He is working there, what is His will, and what is evil.

Several types of service should be distinguished. First there is the daily work of the individual man or woman. Then there are the voluntary services to others, undertaken either alone or together with fellow-Christians in some common cause. And there are the corporate services and actions of the churches.

Most of us do our daily work and spend much of our lives in homes, factories, shops, offices and farms. We share in the collective discipline of work with many who are not Christians, and join with them in groups such as trade unions, business organizations and professional associations. We pay taxes, carry out civic duties, care for our families. We may join political, social and other organizations, whose members are often largely not Christians. The major part of our service must be undertaken in such spheres as these and is often indistinguishable from the humanitarian acts of others.

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If we do not see our daily work as Christian service, is it because we are in the wrong job, or because we are missing opportunities, or because we have too narrow a view of what service means?

Today mankind is one as never before. Social and economic forces bring men together, but also lead to greater conflicts and dissensions. While some people get steadily richer, others stagnate in age-old poverty, but today they know that something can be done about it and this makes it worse. Population pressures and racial tensions aggravate man's divisions. God calls him to unity and he creates disunity.

There may seem little we can do as individuals about these vast problems, yet we all have some opportunities to exercise influence. We have responsibilities in our families and so can endeavour to understand the problems of family planning. We may be able to help in building new communities in our village or in growing towns or suburbs. There may be people of different races in our area, or there may be social and class distinctions we could help to break down. Through thoughtful political action we can influence the decisions affecting war and peace, and the building up of underdeveloped countries.

Our congregations and churches are part of the complex and changing world in which their members serve. Church members alternate between assembling in church activities (i.e., Sunday worship and week-day meetings) and scattering in the life of the world. Can our fellowship in the corporate life of our church

support us in our daily work and in civic life, or is there a danger that the heavy demands of church affairs may distract us from giving due time and effort to our service in the world?

Many churches are attempting to help and to educate their members to understand better the opportunities of service and the wider affairs of the world. They are doing something, and could do more to affirm the unity of all men and to work for peace. They could, perhaps, be giving a lead in plans for the fairer distribution of the world's resources for the benefit of all mankind. Yet all these efforts will bear fruit only when those who learn from them act on what they have learned in the places where policy is made—in politics, government and industry alongside their fellows, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Some churches can exert pressure on political authorities. How and when should this be done? Others may have to remain silent. How can they serve their country as churches? What could churches do to help nations to work with other nations?

Many churches carry out social services. When public authorities undertake these, as in the case of hospitals and schools, new opportunities and new fields for Christian service should be explored. What is the position in your country? Where should the churches withdraw from old institutions and start new pioneering enterprises?

It is a function of the World Council of Churches to help the churches to think about these matters. It has made statements on which Christians from all over the world have agreed on matters concerning war and atomic energy, race, population, the problems of rapid social change and the responsibilities of the richer countries to the underdeveloped countries. The World Council of Churches has also carried out a world-wide service on behalf of refugees and others in need. How widely known in your area and church are these statements and actions? How could they be more widely known and supported?

Our Service in Christ

All service we perform is response to Christ's self-giving. We are servants of the Servant who restores true humanity. Our service is a witness to the reconciling act of God in all the infinitely varied life of the peoples.

The churches are called to share in His ministry to the world, and this call is addressed to the body of Christ, including both ministers "set apart" and lay men and lay women, regardless of age and class, nation and race. It requires the unity of all the people of God for its fulfilment. Such service in its full range demands action at local, national and world levels of corporate church life.

Our service as individuals, no matter how good it may be, is always inadequate, always limited by our sins and errors. And only in so far as the churches accept Christ's service in repentance and renewal are they able to continue their service in the world until His coming.



UNITY

The Local Church

When someone says, "We have such a fine fellowship in our church", what does he or she mean? Is the church merely a club or a clique of like-minded people who get on well and have a fine time? When someone says, "No one ever speaks to me when I go to church", does this mean that in that congregation Christians are not ready to welcome people who are "not their sort" and do not think of the church as a fellowship which God is creating out of very different people? If someone says, "The church is full of party struggles; church people are always quarreling", does he mean that different sorts of people are learning, often with great difficulty, to live together in fellowship, or that no effort is being made to reconcile their differences? When a Christian says of someone else, "He's not one of us", does he mean that there are people, inside or outside the church, with whom he need not be troubled?

These are things people say every day. They lead us straight into the causes of Christian disunity, which starts with the fact that Christians both misunderstand and disobey the Gospel. They show how our church life denies the gospel we preach, even if we disregard the fact that in our community there may be separated, competing and even hostile Christian denominations.

Reconciliation in Christ

See Bible
Studies 4, 6

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5: 19).

The world is estranged from God and divided against itself. Christ came and died for us, to call together His divided sinful people and make them one with God and with each other as members of His body. We have been reconciled to Christ: we have been reconciled to one another: we have had committed to us “the message of reconciliation”. All these are parts of one whole truth. The Church has been sent into the world to be the minister of reconciliation, to be the fellowship in which we learn to get on with the brothers God has given us—rather than the friends we could have chosen for ourselves.

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But we have allowed the disunity of the world to divide the Church. Often the divided churches themselves introduce fresh divisions among people who were united. The Church proclaims a Gospel of reconciliation but acts a lie against it. We are summoned to repent, to be reconciled in our own life, to re-order our church life, so that the world can see that the Church lives what it preaches because men and women are being built up together into one fellowship. Division in the Church contradicts its own nature, distorts its witness and frustrates its mission. “He who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (I Jn. 4: 20). If we continue to be estranged from one another, can we claim to be in a right relation with God? “First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt. 5: 24). When St. Paul hears of party spirit and quarrelling in the church at Corinth, his reply is: “Is Christ divided” (I Cor. 1: 13)? Unity concerns every member of the Church, and not ministers, theologians and church leaders only. Paul told the same local church at Corinth that as a human body has many parts, so all its members are necessary if the Christian body is to function properly. If, then, we are faithful to Scripture, can we say that disunity doesn’t matter?

Why are so many Christians content to tolerate continued division and disunity?

Fears and Hopes

See Bible
Study 3

When congregations and churches begin to think about unity, a variety of fears and hopes are aroused in their minds. Some are unjustifiable; they are false and unworthy. Christians ought not to fear unity because they are

afraid that it will mean the end of the power and status of their own church; and they ought not to hope for unity because they expect that a united church can exercise more worldly power in the community.

Here are some of the hopes and fears that the thought of unity does arouse: Some fear uniformity of teaching, organization and ways of worship; others hope that unity will bring a fruitful diversity in a more inclusive unity.

Some fear that essential truth may be compromised; others hope that in unity we may be led into a greater understanding of truth.

Some fear that unity will mean a dull and lifeless uniformity; others hope that the sharing of our different experiences will bring renewal.

Some fear that a nation-wide church unity will foster nationalism; others hope that unity will enable the church to fulfil more faithfully its calling within the life of the nation and also maintain its close relations with churches in other lands.

Some fear that unity will increase the burden and power of central organization; others hope that unity may give us more adequate means to fulfil neglected parts of the Church's mission.

Some fear that a particular union will delay a wider union; others hope that such a union will give the uniting churches a wider and deeper Christian life than that of the parent churches, and so be a step to wider union.

Where do your convictions lie? Which of these hopes and fears are false or unjustifiable?

Unity and Disunity in Your Situation

When you consider the church situation in your own neighbourhood, what would you say are the main causes of division among Christians?

Division may be the result of causes which are not primarily religious or theological, but social or economic: differences of income or education, of race or language or culture, disagreements over such questions as gambling, drinking or dancing. Division may result from emotional causes: loyalties to a particular congregation or church building or minister, dislike of unfamiliar ways of worship, unwillingness to consider the possibility of change. Division may come from the narrow views of a minister or priest; or from the fact that the busy activities of the church keep everyone concerned too fully occupied to have time for anything or anyone outside. Division may come from sheer ignorance: nearby congregations may know nothing of each other or what they think is knowledge may be a caricature and if they do know something about another church, they may be betrayed into prejudice or uncharitableness by lack of understanding of the background.

There are also religious and theological reasons for disunity. Here are some of the most obvious: there are differences in teaching and ways of worship between one church and another. Some churches welcome all Christians freely at the Lord's Table and allow their members to communicate in churches of other confessions; other churches cannot conscientiously do so.

Some churches proselytize, that is, try to make converts among members of other Christian communions. Churches have different rules about mixed marriages.

Yet even more basic questions of belief divide us. Where is the source of authority in the Church? The Bible? Tradition? Bishop or Synod? The Inner Light? There are differing attitudes to the Bible. There are the claims made for the "historic episcopate". Churches differ in the importance they attach to creeds and confessional statements and the place of these in the life of the Church.

When these differences are examined it is found that they often involve different ways of understanding the whole Christian faith.

Which of these causes of division and disunity seem most important? Are they quite unreal to you or to most people in your congregation? Are you part of the solution or part of the problem?

Moving Forward Together

See Bible
Study 5

Is your own congregation taking steps to remove divisions within its ranks? Is there a truly representative meeting of the whole body?

In your neighbourhood what are the churches of different denominations doing together? Do they pray for one another? Have you tried—joint action for inter-church aid? Joint house-to-house visitation? Ecumenical youth work? Joint house meetings? United public witness on social issues? United evangelism in various forms? Do the various local churches send fraternal delegates to each others' church council meetings? Share in each others' worship?

How can the churches in your locality participate in a wider ecumenical unity of prayer and action? Through intercession for other churches and for councils of churches? Through participating in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity? Through the use in our worship of prayers and hymns from other Christian traditions? Through visitors from other parts of the world and other confessions?

Does your congregation realize that your church is a member of the World Council of Churches? Do you know who will be representing your church at New Delhi? Do you pray for them and for the World Council?

Are you doing anything in your neighbourhood to improve relations with Christians who are members of churches which are least congenial to your own outlook and with which you have the greatest hesitation in co-operating?

On this "ecumenical check-list", what is your score? Where should you start in making a further move forward? The Lund Conference on Faith and Order in 1952 challenged the churches to "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately".

The Unity We Seek

At its meeting in 1960 the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches made this declaration:

"The unity which is both God's will and His gift to His Church is one which brings all in each place who confess Christ Jesus as Lord into a fully

committed fellowship with one another through one baptism into Him, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel and breaking the one bread, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all, and which at the same time unites them with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are acknowledged by all and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls the Church."

How does this challenge your own congregation, the congregations of your neighbourhood, the life of your denomination or confession?

What do you now think, as a result of your study and discussion, are the next steps for you?





THE LOCAL TASK IN A TOTAL VISION

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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“So there is to be another big meeting of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi in 1961. That will be the third in 14 years, won’t it? Wasn’t there one at Amsterdam, and one in the United States at Evanston? Our church leaders must have a pretty good time travelling like this! I suppose the meetings do some good, but I can’t see that they help us very much in our job here with this struggling congregation.”

We have all heard that voice before. Sometimes it has been our voice. It is an important voice to be listened to seriously. This booklet is one small sign that those who serve the ecumenical movement, and the World Council of Churches particularly, listen seriously to it.

Who will be at the Third Assembly of the WCC in Delhi? The trusted leaders of the churches, archbishops, bishops, moderators, denominational secretaries and superintendents—theologians and scholars who are expert in various fields of study and research—and members of the WCC staff. But many will be pastors, laymen and women. All of them, including the church leaders, will be there by vote and resolution of the appropriate legislative assemblies of the churches. In fact, these are the people who represent the churches which constitute the World Council. Between Assemblies, ninety of them meet every year in the Central Committee of the Council and others attend the related committees and commissions of the Council.

There is a very real sense in which each local congregation may truly say not “they will be there”, implying people from Geneva, or even from their denominational headquarters, but “we shall be there”.



Youth Work Camps point the way to unity through service.

The Movement Began in the Churches

The modern ecumenical movement began in response to situations which local congregations were facing. It is customary to date its beginning to a conference—the great missionary conference in 1910 at Edinburgh—but that did not take place because someone thought it was a good idea to have a meeting, but because throughout the missions and the churches there was a great restlessness and uneasiness of mind. In the mission field the confusion created by the divisions of western Christendom was being perpetuated and the younger churches were bewildered. The advance of Christ's Kingdom was being hindered because of the lack of unity in witness and strategy in the missionary task. Above all it was being discovered that a divided Church could not truly witness to one Lord in the face of a pagan world.

From the frontiers of the mission field the challenge reverberated through the churches at home. They too were facing problems due to their lack of unity, not only in rivalry in local village, town and city, but in facing the new

problems of a new century, social problems arising from industrial relationships, urbanization, technological developments, and problems of peace and war. The world-wide concern about missions found expression in the formation of the International Missionary Council. The world-wide concern about unity found expression in the Faith and Order movement, and that for social and political problems in the Life and Work movement.

In Amsterdam in 1948 these two streams flowed together to form the World Council of Churches. Since Amsterdam the streams of life and thought in the missionary movement and in the World Council of Churches have been flowing towards each other and will have their confluence in Delhi. Like all great rivers, they did not rise as such. They are fed by many tributaries, some large, some small—springs of life which flow from congregations of Christian people in every land. One of the most significant facts of the last 14 years is that new churches which have found their independence and autonomy, “younger churches” as we sometimes call them, have often as one of their first independent acts sought membership of the World Council. Some great churches which at first remained aloof, or were not free to enter into relationship with the World Council of Churches, begin now to seek to do so. In the “covenanting” Assembly at Amsterdam when the World Council of Churches was formed, 145 Orthodox, Old Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches created the World Council. Today there are 178 member churches.

The first six years of the Council's life were a period of rapid growth and new adventure. The churches which at Amsterdam had declared their conviction that God had brought them together declared at Evanston their intention under God to stay together. No one can forecast the actual resolutions which will be passed at Delhi, but of one thing we may be sure: the delegates will acknowledge with gratitude what God has given to the churches through their fellowship and, as they move forward into the next period in response to God's call to Unity, Witness and Service, they will seek to be led by the Holy Spirit and to be given grace to follow His leading.

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Pioneers and Present Leadership

Inevitably the development of this movement is associated with the great names of John R. Mott, J. H. Oldham, Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, Bishop Charles Brent, Archbishop William Temple, Archbishop Germanos of Thyateira, Bishop George Bell, Bishop Eivind Berggrav, and many others. These are great men, but not remote men. Where did they come from? They were nurtured in Christian congregations, cradled in the local fellowships of Christian people. To have known them is to have known that they never forgot, as their successors do not forget, the communities from which they came and which God had called them to serve in what are sometimes called the “wider ministries of the Church”.

The leadership of the World Council of Churches is rooted in the churches.

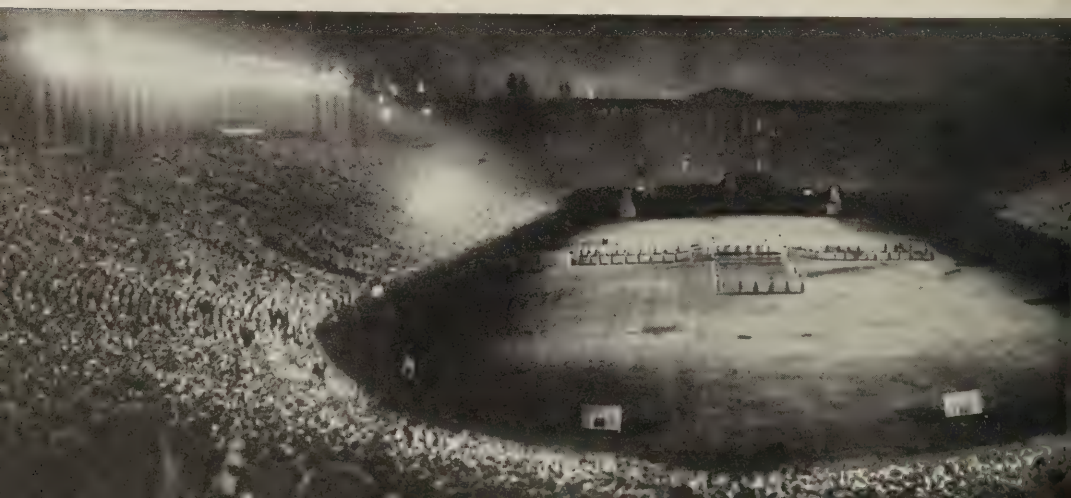
The Purpose of Travel

This same concern to keep the World Council of Churches in touch with the life of the member churches and their congregations accounts for the amount of travel which is done by the committee members and by the staff. This is a World Council of Churches; it belongs to every church and nation. That is why since Evanston the Central Committee has met in Switzerland, Hungary, the United States of America, Denmark, on the island of Rhodes, and, appropriately in 1960 on the fiftieth anniversary of the Edinburgh Conference, in Scotland. The small twelve-member Executive Committee met in Australia in 1956 and Argentina in 1960. On these occasions, committee members and staff undertake a full round of engagements, preach in various churches, address public meetings, enter into consultation with clergy and ministers, lay groups of all kinds, and student organisations. In this way the churches of these nations catch something of the wonder, the richness and the vision of their membership in a World Council of Churches and the World Council itself is challenged, nourished and stimulated by new understanding and insight into the life of the churches.

The travel of various members of the staff serves the same purpose. They travel to learn of the churches they are called to serve, to interpret what is happening in their own particular field among the churches throughout the world, and to symbolise in their persons the concern of the whole fellowship of the World Council of Churches for every member church.

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When the general secretary, for example, attends a conference of churches in South Africa on the problems of race, or the centenary celebrations of Japanese churches, or leads a delegation to the churches in Russia, he goes in the name of all the churches. The same holds true of his colleagues. When churches are discussing union in Madagascar, or Christian leaders are wrestling with the problems created for their churches and their nations by the impact of technical development in Asia and Africa, or your leaders are facing the



task of claiming the youth of Latin America for Christ, or lay men and women are seeking to find ways by which they may fulfil their evangelistic task in 20th century society in India or the United States of America, or church leaders of East and West are striving to keep the Christian fellowship unbroken in spite of political and ideological barriers, staff members and others from the World Council of Churches are called to enter into their problems and to give what guidance they can from the experience of churches in other parts of the world.

It might be said that the World Council of Churches exists so that Christians around the world shall no longer speak of "they" and "we": "they"—the clergy, "we"—the laity; "they"—the men, "we"—the women; "they"—the Catholics, "we"—the Protestants; "they"—the old people, "we"—the young people; "they" of the East, and "we" of the West; "they" of the national church, "we" of the local congregation, or vice versa; but in obedience to Christ and in love and service of Him they may always and altogether say "we the Church of Christ".



Top right - A five-member WCC delegation visited Russia at the invitation of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Middle right - Christian leaders attend the WCC Central Committee each year.

Lower right - Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, IMC General Secretary, talks with WCC General Secretary

Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft

Left - Soldier Field, Chicago; Festival of Faith at Second Assembly, 1954.

The churches, and that means the people of Christ gathered in their various congregations and communions, have created the World Council of Churches. They have created it so that one day they might dispense with it. The World Council of Churches lives to die. If the churches ever become content with it or concerned solely to perpetuate it, then they will be disobedient to the heavenly vision. The World Council is a tabernacle of a pilgrim people to serve only until God fulfils His promise and purpose for them to make them one in Him and for Him.

This is all very well, but the voice of the local congregation, which is sometimes our voice, would have every reason for protesting at this point that the real issue has been evaded. "How do all this work and all these meetings affect our congregations, or for that matter the churches of a nation?" "Does the World Council of Churches do anything to help us hold our own young people and win others who, with their eccentricities and extravagances, their rootlessness and outbreaks of violence, cause us so much anxiety? Does the World Council do anything to help Christian laymen bear their witness in office and factory and workshop? What can a World Council do to help men and women to a full partnership in the life of the church and society? In some societies they are still regarded as chattels. Can the World Council really help us to get on with the people in the other congregations in our neighbourhood? What can the World Council do to help us make our influence felt when our government is taking political and economic action which affects the lives of millions in Africa and Asia, or when big business is exploiting the people or resources of these lands? For years we have been giving our money to missions and sending some of our best young people to the mission field, but often progress seems to be discouragingly slow. Has the World Council anything to say about that?

"Almost every day when we open the newspapers we read of a disaster somewhere, or of the outbreak of a war with thousands of people made homeless; what is the World Council doing about them? What about atom warfare, and divided Europe, and China and India, and all this ferment in the Middle East? Our local congregation, our church, doesn't seem to count in these matters. What is the World Council of Churches doing about these political questions? We have neither the time nor the money to spare for a World Council of Churches, however desirable, if it is not really being practical in helping us do our job."

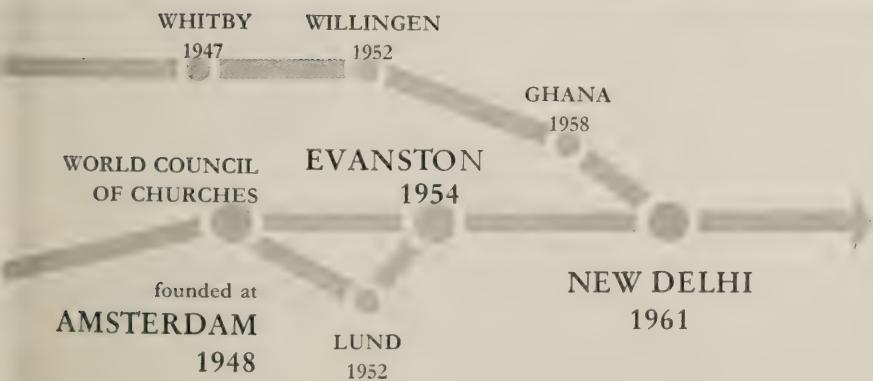
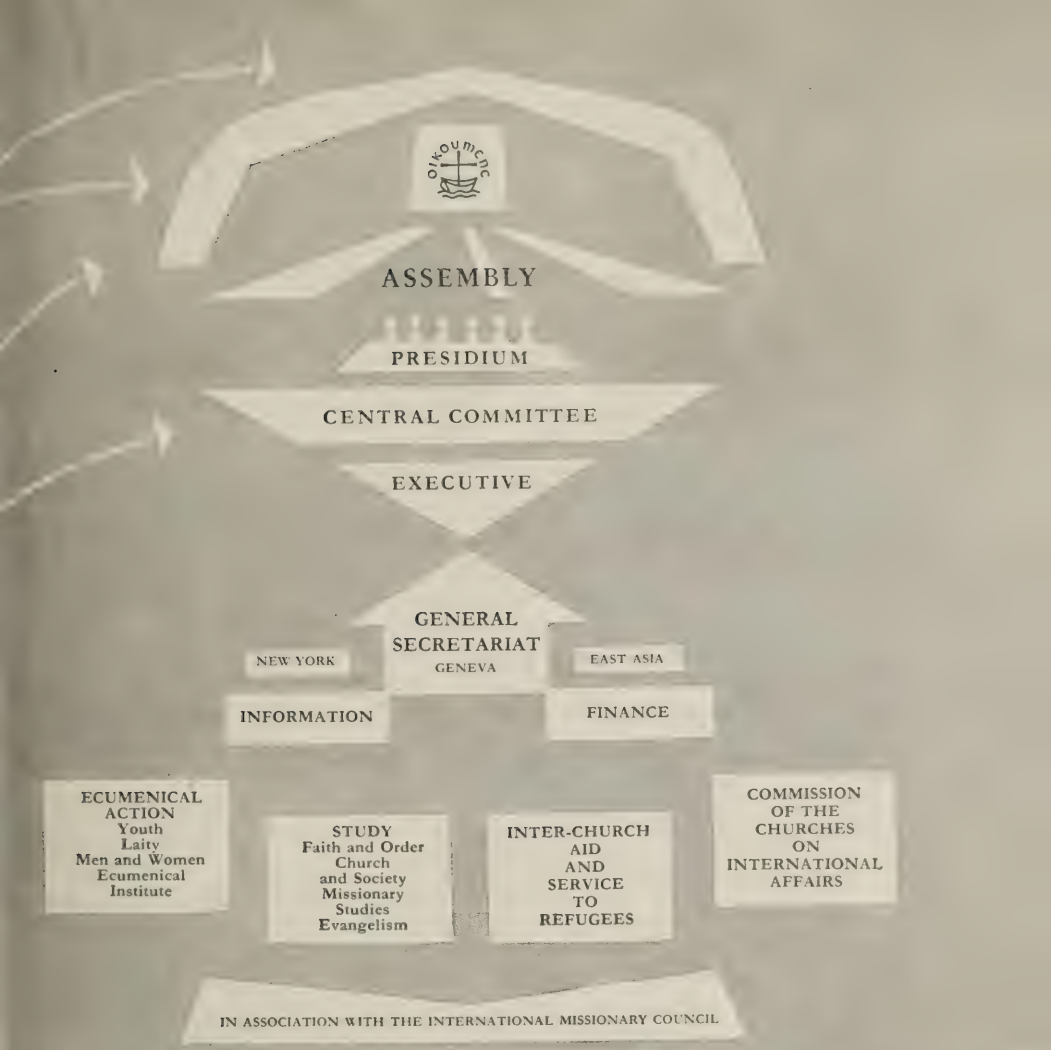
These perfectly proper questions are the very questions which the churches created the World Council to deal with, and in the course of the years they have shaped the Council's organization in such a way as to equip it to deal with them. The local church, the national communion, the world-wide confession, may expect two things to happen from their relationships with the World Council of Churches. They may expect to be helped by the guidance which comes from sharing their experience with other churches and by facing problems in partnership with them. They must also expect to be challenged and stimulated and even disconcerted and disciplined by seeing their own needs and problems in the light of the life of the whole Church in the whole world.

Building the Fellowship

The tragic leakage of teenagers from the church is not a problem of any one congregation or communion; it is a problem of all the churches. When youth leaders are brought together to share their problems and information about experiments, they begin to discover new ways in which youth may be brought to meaningful membership in the Church. Similarly they begin to learn of one another's ways of reaching the rootless youth of this generation. What is being done, for example, in the "Bread and Wine Mission" among the beatniks of San Francisco will help churches tackling the problems of London's "Teddy boys".

But more than this is needed. Young people themselves must be brought together across the boundaries of their church and nation, within the region in which they live, or into a world fellowship. This the World Council of Churches does. Under its auspices work camps are arranged in all five continents and every year thousands of young people serve together in other lands and suffer from sore hands and tired backs labouring in a common task, worship in traditions other than their own, and go home with a new sense of dedication because they have caught a new vision of the Church of Christ. Young people who cannot take part in this kind of enterprise can become involved through World Youth Projects in finding funds and sending others to help in new kinds of youth work and especially in training youth leaders to strengthen the growing churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Regional assemblies of Christian youth are organised, and the collaboration of other bodies like the World Council of Christian Education and the World Christian Youth Commission is sought for the purpose of building in the age groups 18 to 30 a great company of young people deep in their loyalty to Christ, impatient with the divisions among Christians, and dedicated to serve Christ in the service of their fellows.

And what about the World Council of Churches and the laity? Every church member knows that while he may maintain his personal devotional life and seek to uphold his personal Christian standards in the realms of commerce and industry and in his professional life, he is caught up in systems and procedures which challenge his faith and his standards. He also knows that among the masses in many lands anti-clericalism is rife, and if the Gospel is to be commended lay men and women must commend it in the places where they live and work. From the lay institutes of continental Europe, the ashrams of India, the laymen's movements of Britain and America, all kinds of new experiments for evangelism and for Christian community witness are emanating. A revolution is brewing in the whole understanding of the place and witness of the laity. They are seeing their daily work in office, factory, farm or mine as part of the ministry of the Body of Christ. This is not a question of the laity emulating the clergy, but of the laity being themselves, but themselves in obedience to Christ as Lord. The Laity Department of the World Council of Churches, through new and arresting forms of Bible study and by initiating laity-courses for men and women in different parts of the world, seeks to stimulate this movement. It was appropriate that one of its publications was entitled "Signs of Renewal".



About ten miles from Geneva at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, the World Council has a kind of laboratory where men and women from various walks of life, from many lands and many churches, are brought together at an ecumenical meeting point. Study conferences of atomic scientists, nurses, prison workers, church historians, architects, psychotherapists, industrial workers and many other vocational groups, have been held there in recent years, as well as educational summer courses for missionaries and pastors, lay men and women, and theological students. They live together, pray together, study the Bible together, and open up their problems under the leadership of a resident staff, whose members come from Germany, the United States, Greece, and Central Africa. They do not always find the answers, but they find Christ in a new way. At Bossey a real transmutation and conversion of minds and attitudes and outlooks takes place.

For four and a half months in the winter, under the leadership of the same staff and of guest professors, Bossey houses a Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies where some 40 people of various ages, mostly theologians, drawn from many churches and many lands, pursue studies in a new setting and a new fellowship. Centring around one challenging issue of present-day ecumenism, they struggle through the obstacles of their divisions, in worship and study, catching a glimpse of the ecumenical vision and savouring that unity which Christ has given and which it is His will His whole Church should know.

62 We must not assume that the voice which asked searching questions about the World Council was a man's voice. It might equally well have been a woman's. In many churches where this booklet is read it will be taken for granted that there is no problem about the co-operation of men and women either in the Church or in society. Those who even raise a question about the status of women may be regarded as eccentric and aggressive feminists. But membership of the World Council poses some searching questions even to these churches. Are the traditional patterns of service for women in the churches adequate? Are the structure and programmes of women's organisations really satisfactory? Are women being given the chance to play their full part in the total ministries of the Church? Questions like these are not answered by fulsome votes of thanks to the ladies for preparing the parish tea, for decorating the church at Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festivals, or for organising the most recent and most lucrative sale of work!

In great continents and among teeming millions the place and status of women in Church and society, and their role in partnership with men is among the most urgent problems to be faced. Many societies are quick to see that Christian teaching about the place of women in marriage, in work, in social customs is revolutionary. Yet sometimes a church which proclaims this Gospel and teaches this doctrine is far behind secular national and social reforms in its own age. And what can churches in the West learn from one another with regard to the vexing question of outside employment undertaken by married women with families?

Through the years the World Council has sought to keep such issues before the churches. Here is a realm of Christian thought and life where churches

of all continents have found that their membership in the World Council has called in question their assumptions and challenged what they took to be axioms.

These concerns for youth, laity, ecumenical education, the co-operation of men and women in Church and society, are all represented and served by special departments of the World Council of Churches, gathered together in a Division named "the Division of Ecumenical Action". Striving for unity and co-operation in study and service must be accompanied by a real *renewal* of the churches in these and all other aspects of their lives.

A Reason for the Hope That Is in Us

Questions about how the World Council of Churches serves the member churches and their congregations are not to be answered in terms of conferences and travelogues. To the churches is committed a Gospel which they must seek continuously to understand, live by and interpret.

If all the congregations in a neighbourhood, for example, suddenly decided to make common cause and come together, they would soon be splitting up again if they had not come together in a real reconciliation, that is with true understanding, deep penitence and genuine conviction that only thus could they really be obedient to the call of Christ. Unity means much more than mere togetherness: it is manifesting the unity given to us in Christ.

The churches, through their leaders and scholars who were dedicated to the cause of the unity of Christ's Church, recognized this fact in the early days of the Faith and Order movement. When they had got over the first flush of excitement at being together they began to realise how much damage had been caused by the divisions of the centuries. The churches had not been on speaking terms for so long that when they began to speak to each other they found that while they used the same words they meant quite different things. They found that some emphasised the authority of tradition, and some the authority of the Bible. They found that they had been looking at each other from a distance with jaundiced eyes and reading church history with denominational blinkers on. They found that though they were separated, the Holy Spirit had been leading the various communions into an understanding of various aspects of the truth of the Gospel. They also discovered that when they came to the point of theological agreement, arguments from quite different origins began to appear which hindered their progress to complete reconciliation. National, racial, institutional, and class interests began to raise their heads. The aim of the World Council is to bring the theologians and scholars of the world together to think and work together on this subject of Christian unity. The longing for fuller unity underlies every part of the World Council's work, but it is especially expressed in its Faith and Order Commission and Department. Studies on "Christ and the Church", on "Tradition", and on "The Meaning of Worship", and attempts to identify and appraise the influence of non-theological factors such as institutionalism, and the reporting of unions that have taken place, and of negotiations for union, are some of its tasks. It is all

carried out in the interests of finding answers to the questions: What does it mean for Christians to have been baptised in the name of the Trinity and made members of one body by that act? In what way is God calling us to manifest that unity for which Christ prayed? To come together unthinkingly would be as disastrous as to stay divided contentedly.

It is not only in the interests of Faith and Order that the riches and treasures of Christian scholarship are gathered together by the World Council. Just as in the realm of scientific achievement the great discoveries are made by scientists working in teams, so are they made by team work in this whole realm of Christian thought and understanding. Sunday by Sunday in the worship of the congregations we assert in creed and praise and prayer that Jesus Christ is Lord. But what does that mean? For many it is a pious affirmation, but for many more it is an invitation to persecution and oppression.

That Jesus Christ is Lord is the heart of the Christian faith and central to the Biblical message. What does the Bible mean when it affirms that Jesus Christ is Lord over the Church and over the world? To the ordinary church member his faith and his Bible will come to mean more if he will take the trouble to listen to what Christian scholars are saying to him through the World Council's study on "The Lordship of Christ over the World and the Church".

There are other ways of coming face to face with this Christian affirmation that Jesus Christ is Lord. We may begin where we are. How many imported goods do people in the West buy from Asian countries? There are very many. What lies behind these goods? What economic development, what technical development, what human conditions of work? How many Christians in Asia and Africa long, in the name of Christ, for an alleviation of hunger and poverty among the people? What must be done? A revolution is needed, and it is going on. There are surging tides of nationalism and a passionate resolve among the peoples of these continents for justice with freedom. Whether we acknowledge it or not, the churches have a responsibility and an opportunity to make a far-reaching witness in this massive struggle.

The World Council of Churches has given high priority to a world study on "The Common Christian Responsibility toward Areas of Rapid Social Change". Social scientists, theologians, economists and political leaders have been marshalled for this study, in national and regional conferences, consultations and study groups leading to an international conference at Salonica, Greece, in July 1959. At test points in the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, Kenya, Liberia, Kerala, São Paulo, South Africa, Northern Sumatra and Japan men and women are translating insights gained in this study into Christian action in politics, labour unions, rural co-operation. Christians of East and West have been drawn together in partnership in this enterprise to claim the world's increasingly complex life for Jesus Christ as Lord.

When a local congregation or a national church asks whether its interests are served by a World Council of Churches it is perhaps asking more than

From peasant village to mighty city, the rapid changes of Africa, Asia and Latin America are studied in depth by the churches.



*Top left - A colony of 500
Old Believers, White Russian
refugees from China,
was resettled by the WCC in
Parana State, Brazil*

*Centre - Home for refugee
children in Belgium.*

*Right - Books for theological
libraries and scholarships for
study abroad help strengthen the
churches' understanding of
each other.*

*Bottom left - Church-donated
food supplies help feed the
hungry around the world.*





it intended. The answer must be made in terms of Christian responsibility for and in a great social revolution; an answer which means they will never be able merely to "recite a creed" or "sing a hymn" to Christ as Lord again.

This is not all. These surging tides of nationalism are finding expression both in a revival of ancient cultural traditions and therefore of ancient religions, and in the embracing of modern secularised and materialistic political ideologies. Either way it means a rejection of the Christian faith and the Christian Church as something extraneous, imported by colonialists and imperialists. Christian churches are often regarded as vestiges of a colonialism that is rejected, or the outposts of a new economic imperialism which is resented. What does that mean for the missions of the Church, and fulfilment of its evangelistic tasks? How can it be made plain that Christ belongs to all? What does the proclamation of Christ as Lord mean for Hindus and Buddhists and Moslems who themselves have been caught up by a new conviction of the relevance of their faiths? How can the churches in these lands make it clear that they are churches of their own people identified with their people's aspirations, yet one with the people of Christ in every land? Can the Church claim mass communication media like radio, television, newsprint, in the service of the Gospel? These are questions no church alone can answer. There must be some strategy conceived in unity and worked out in common witness.

The member churches of the World Council provided themselves with a Study Division, not just to do research in some ecumenical "ivory-tower", but so that there may be "study engineering", bringing the scholars together and collating and co-ordinating their work as the background and basis for a Christian strategy. In its departments of Faith and Order, Church and Society, Evangelism and Missionary Studies, all in close co-operation with the International Missionary Council, the Division seeks to fulfil this mandate which the churches have given to it.

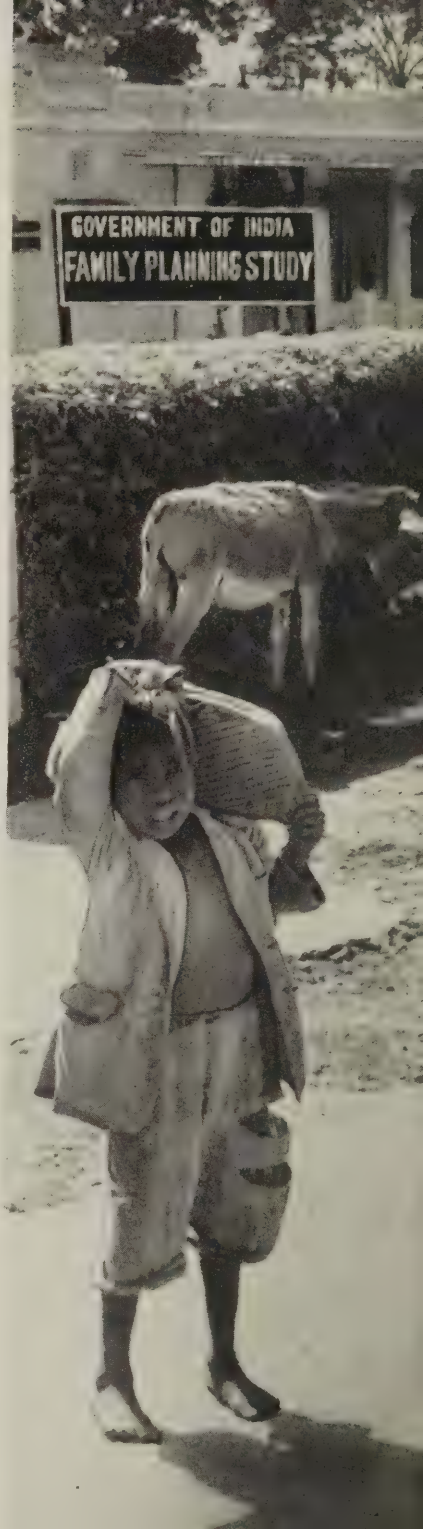
Giving Proof of Our Love

"Ecumenical education and ecumenical study", the critic's voice may well protest, "are important, but can we wait till these processes are completed and the new strategy is devised? People are hungry and homeless now, and churches are suffering and hard pressed. What is the World Council doing?"

Anyone who knows anything at all about the World Council would admit that its service of the churches in education and study is in a real sense action, but from the beginning the member churches have seen that there are certain specific ministries in obedience to Christ which they must exercise in consultation with each other, and some they must exercise together. Long before the Council was officially formed the churches began to co-operate in these ministries. Almost spontaneously they came together to work among prisoners of war and refugees from the terrors of concentration camps and gas chambers, and to aid the war-battered churches and peoples of Europe and Asia. In their response to need the churches began to discover one another and to realise that they had to collaborate to exercise a wise stewardship of resources and to tackle certain urgent tasks. The World Council of Churches provided a clearing house for information about needs, a channel for aid, and an instrument for co-operative action.

What began as an emergency programme of limited duration has become recognized as a permanent obligation. Churches which are bound together in acknowledgment of Christ as God and Saviour cannot but seek to express their fellowship in mutual aid. Churches which together proclaim the Lordship of Christ over the world cannot but reach out their hands to help all who are in need.

This child's future is a Christian concern.



This ministry has reached vast proportions. In 1959 the churches made gifts to the value of \$ 85 million in this service. Together the churches have worked for homeless and stateless people through the Refugee Service of the World Council. Since 1948, 220,000 refugees have been resettled in newlands, homes and jobs. Medical care, language instruction, vocational training, education, welfare counselling, pastoral care, have provided for thousands of others, and special attention is given to the sick, incapacitated and aged.

Where disaster strikes through war, riot, flood and earthquake the churches move in to help. News of a disaster is flashed by cable around the world and often within 12 hours help from the churches is on the way.

The churches are knit through this ministry in a network of mutual aid, too. Sick pastors and church workers are cared for in Switzerland and other countries, and brought to the World Council's health home, Casa Locarno. Medical supplies are sent through to East Europe. Theological literature is provided for churches which have no libraries or no means of replenishing the ones they have. Through the scholarship programme, more than 2,000 theological students have already been given the opportunity of studying in countries and seminaries other than their own, and about 130 students every year benefit in this way. The channelling of material aid, food and clothing to needy people, the encouragement of self-help for parishes and church institutions through the Ecumenical Loan Fund, the maintenance of service teams in Greece, Italy, Kenya, Tunisia, and the recruiting of fraternal workers are all part of this kaleidoscopic ministry in all the continents which the churches exercise through the World Council of Churches.

Clearly the accent is on service, but the witness of the churches is strengthened as they are aided to minister to the needy around their doors. The cause of unity is strengthened too, for often the first contacts made between churches of varying traditions and nations are in this mutual aid. When churches have clasped hands in time of emergency and crisis they do not so easily slip back again into isolation and separation.

Perhaps nowhere are the local congregations more involved than in this work. The support of this service comes from congregations and flows to congregations.

In organising, co-ordinating and being the instrument of such a ministry the World Council of Churches through the Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees enables the churches to give proof of their love in Christ for one another and for all men.

Into the Path of Righteousness and the Way of Peace

The member of the congregation who complains that the churches are powerless in the realm where political decisions are taken, and that no one reads or heeds his church's resolutions on current international affairs, would be less dogmatic and less depressed if he knew of the work of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. Before the World Council was established this Commission was set up in 1946 by the joint action of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches in process

of formation. With its offices in New York, London and Geneva, and with the help of consultant commissioners in 26 different countries, it seeks to keep the churches informed of the actual issues from which tension and conflicts may develop and helps them to take concerted action at regional, national and world level. It seeks to make the Christian voice heard at the time and place of intergovernmental decision where peace and justice are at stake and swift intervention is essential to avoid or overcome crises. Day in day out its officers vigilantly study and watch the changing political landscape and are actively on the scene at the United Nations, at Summit and Foreign Ministers' Conferences, and at any place where a contribution may be made to the prevention of war and the promotion of peace.

The churches' concern for disarmament has been often expressed in the strong statements of the World Council of Churches' Central and Executive Committees, and of the Commission itself, advocating the cessation of nuclear weapons testing, the conclusion of treaties on disarmament with provision for international inspection and control, and the further developments for peaceful change and peaceful settlement. In the crises of Egypt and Hong Kong, and the long drawn-out troubles of Cyprus, the Commission's officers, while keeping in touch with the church and political leaders of the nations concerned, made available their facilities to provide information and to seek a speedy and just settlement.

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On the basis of detailed knowledge the Commission seeks to remind governments regularly of the plight of refugees and the possibility of international action on their behalf, while issues of religious liberty, international assistance for economic and social development, population problems, the welfare and advancement of dependent territories, engage its continuous attention and evoke patient and careful negotiation and painstaking preparation of valid factual information for the briefing of church leaders.

The resolutions in the parish meeting and the church assembly need not be lost. These expressions of Christian convictions and judgements are brought by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs into the realm of the possible, which is the art of politics. The Commission assists and informs dedicated Christian men and women who have been at pains to learn the techniques by which political decisions are reached and political actions taken. Here is something new in the international scene, something which exists because of a World Council of Churches.

Telling the News

There is one task which the World Council is only beginning, the task of communication. The voice which asks what the World Council is doing, how does it help us in our struggling congregation, a voice which is heard all over the world, is an indication of the size of the task. The World Council of Churches has an Information Department which through church press and

The churches give together



daily press, radio, television, films, photography, exhibitions and publications is continually seeking to tell the story in the Council's three official languages—English, French and German. But there are hundreds of churches, thousands of congregations and millions of Christians in the world who ask: "How does the World Council of Churches help us?" They are entitled to an answer.

They must also expect to be asked in turn what they can do in the World Council of Churches. They can support its work with their gifts. They can remember it in their prayers. They can go on asking questions and seeking to be informed. They can hold themselves ready to respond to the call to



Communication is needed

service of the ecumenical vision as it comes to them. But they will serve the World Council and the ecumenical movement best not by focussing attention on the Council as such, nor on its member churches, but by fastening their gaze on Him who is the Lord of the World Council, the Lord of the Church and the churches and of the world.

He is the source of the Church's Unity, Witness and Service. It is He who, lifted up, draws the Church and the world to Himself.



SUGGESTIONS ON THE USE OF THIS BOOKLET

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New Delhi and the Local Churches

When the delegates of your church go to New Delhi in your name, they are your representatives, and must be able to count on your prayers, your understanding and your support. They meet from November 18th to December 6th 1961, with the representatives of your fellow-Christians from all over the world. This Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches is an opportunity for the member churches to learn to understand one another better, to work more closely with one another, and to grow together in Christ, so that the real unity of the Church may be more fully seen, "that the world may believe"; and to this end, to make plans for the work of the World Council of Churches.

The work of your delegates at New Delhi is a part of the work and witness of all churches everywhere, yours included. This booklet has been prepared to help you participate in the work at New Delhi, although you will not be there yourself.

Our Prayers

The best way to prepare to be present in heart and mind is through prayer—prayer for the delegates of our own and other churches, prayer for the people of New Delhi, prayer for our fellow-Christians in the neighbourhood, prayer for the World Council's officers and staff—above all, prayer with our Lord in His prayer “that they all may be one that the world may believe” (John 17:21). Prayer for unity is not easy: it can easily degenerate into “praying against people”—praying in effect that they may become like us—and this is bad for us and annoying to them. We must learn to pray for the unity of the Church *as Christ wills it and by the means He wills and at the time He wills*.

Bible Study, Christian Life, and the World Council of Churches

The three parts are related to one another:

- 1 A statement and eight Bible Studies on the General Theme: “Jesus Christ the Light of the World.” What do we mean when we say Jesus Christ is the Light of the World? How can we say it most understandably to the millions who are seeking light and think they can find it somewhere else, or doubt if it can be found at all? How can *this* Assembly, meeting in India, proclaim Jesus Christ as the Light of the World in a country where “light” is a religious symbol familiar to the non-Christian population? Before we do anything else, we must listen to what the Bible says; and a study of the passages selected will deepen our understanding of our Lord’s claim: “I am the Light of the world.”
74 Pages 7-37
- 2 We have to show this light in word and deed. In the Sections of the Assembly these practical questions will be studied under the headings: Witness, Service and Unity—witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ; service to mankind in the name of Jesus Christ; unity of all Christians in Jesus Christ. These are three essential expressions of our life in Christ, apart from which our teaching in word will be little more than a “noisy gong or clanging cymbal” in the ears of non-Christian people.
Pages 38-51
- 3 The World Council belongs to the churches, and to each of their members. If it is to serve its member churches everywhere, all of them must help to define its tasks. Is it working at the right tasks? Does it help your church to undertake your part of the mission which God has entrusted to all Christians? Has it the right structure? How can it help you and the Christian community in your neighbourhood?
Pages 53-72

The Use of This Booklet

This booklet has been designed especially for the local church. Christians—men and women, clerical and lay—from many parts of the world and many different Christian traditions have worked together to provide something which will enable local congregations everywhere to enter more deeply into one fellowship of thought and prayer. We hope that you will find in it things to help you as you study and pray about the one mission of the One Church of Jesus Christ, and that in this way you will share in the Third Assembly.

Here are some suggestions:

1 The Bible Studies will be most profitable if group study follows private study and meditation. Some churches will have already a Bible study or other group ready to use them; others will want to form such a group to use them; in others again they might be the basis for expository sermons followed by congregational discussion.

2 The studies on Witness, Service and Unity can be used in a group drawn from the whole congregation; in youth groups, men's and women's meetings, missionary or other interested groups, and other organizations; or in the church council. Some churches may find it valuable to invite the organizations to study them separately and present their findings to a meeting of the congregation as a whole.

There is too much material in the booklet for most churches to use profitably. Please pick out what is most useful to you. The questions are meant to be of help to you, not a set of examination papers!

3 In some places churches might do this study together, or have a joint meeting, perhaps with one or more of the delegates to New Delhi, where the results of each congregation's work could be presented. Your local or national council of churches would be glad to help you arrange this kind of meeting.

4 It will be a help to your delegates to know what you think about the things they will be working on at New Delhi. Your findings can be sent to them through the headquarters of your church: this will need to be done by October 1st at the latest.

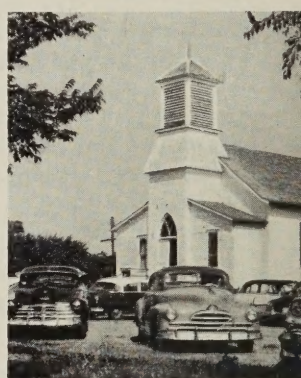
If this is too early for you, can you work on the booklet (or part of it) during October, November and December, while they are on their way to, and taking part in, the Assembly?

The Assembly *needs* your share in it; it must not take place in an "ecumenical stratosphere" but be part of the ordinary life of the whole Church.

It will also be a strength and inspiration to those at New Delhi to know that while they are there, local churches up and down the world are thinking and praying about them.

A Note on Group Study

The leader does not need to be an expert (in fact it is usually better that he or she should *not* be) but does need to have become familiar with the booklet, to have selected the part the group will get most help from, and to have thought about how to make the questions "come alive" for *these people in this place*. In the meeting, he has to encourage the shy and the reserved and to discourage the over-talkative! It is often worthwhile asking the members of the group to read a few sentences in turn before discussion begins. This helps everybody to participate and also ensures that the group becomes familiar with what it is studying.



Members of the group need to be prepared to say what they really think and not only what they hope will sound well! The renewal of the Church for witness, service and unity must start with honesty before God and one another about our present strength and weakness.

The numbers of the group should not be too far above or below twelve—try to get at least six members; if you get above fifteen, it may be better to form two groups.

The appropriate office of your church or council of churches will be glad to give you more help.

To make participation in the
New Delhi Assembly a reality
in local communities all over
the world, books, leaflets, periodicals,

study material, films, pictures and
filmstrips are available. Some deal
with the Assembly's concerns.

Others describe and further the
work of the WCC. Write for
further advice and help to:

The headquarters of your church, or
your National Council of Churches or
Christian Council or to World Council
of Churches, Third Assembly,
17, route de Malagnou, Geneva,

Switzerland and 475

Riverside Drive, Room 439,

New York 27, N.Y., U.S.A.



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